

Gamelan Wanita:
A Study of Women's *Gamelan* in Bali

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March 7, 2003

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Acknowledgements

First, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my mother, Judy Mitoma, my first teacher, for her endless support and encouragement. I would like to thank my brother, Mas Ken Jaya, for being such a model of sensitivity and excellence. My father, Ibu JoLinda, Chandra, and Ibu Barbara Polk for their kindness and generosity while I was living in Honolulu.

I wish to express my deepest and most humble gratitude to Dr. Barbara Watson Andaya for her generous and patient guidance. Her encouragement and enthusiasm while I was in the UH Asian Studies Program kept my spirits high and being in the presence of such a truly great scholar is inspirational. I would like to thank Dr. Ricardo Trimillos for encouraging me to apply to the Asian Studies program, and I also thank my father, Professor Hardja Susilo for taking on the very difficult task of being on my committee and for offering his honest criticism throughout.

I extend my thanks Dr. Leonard Andaya and Dr. Michael Aung-Thwin for opening my mind to so many things. I also gratefully acknowledge the Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship and Office of International Affairs/Office of International Programs and Services whose support made my thesis and my study at the University of Hawaii possible.

I am deeply indebted to my teachers and informants without whom this thesis would not exist, in particular to Banjar Pengosekan and its many great artists, the family of Dewa Aji Nyoman Sura, especially to Desak Made Berati. My deep thanks also to Bapak I Wayan Dibia, Ibu Ni Made Wiratini, Bapak I Ketut Kantor and Bapak I Made Bandem. I offer special thanks to Bapak Tri Haryanto and Bapak I Nyoman Windha for encouraging me to study gamelan despite my deficiencies.

I would also like to thank my husband, I Dewa Putu Berata, for his beautiful illustrations of Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati and the Gamelan Gong Kebyar instruments. I am deeply grateful for his patience, support and care throughout my studies, and for his tolerance for my endless questions and endless work. He has been a source of great inspiration.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the seventh anniversary of my grandmother's passing, which coincided with the completion of my thesis. I also respectfully acknowledge the recent passing from this world of my first dance teacher, Rama Sasminta Mardawa, as well as Bapak Benedictus Suharto. They taught me about the power and grace of the human spirit.

Introduction: Methodology and Background

Until recently, Balinese *gamelan* was the exclusive domain of men. Within the last half century, however, Balinese women have begun to play *gamelan* and form *gamelan* groups. The rapid expansion of women's *gamelan* in Bali (*gamelan wanita*)¹ and its implications for social change are significant not only to Balinese women, but to Balinese society generally. It is therefore a topic that merits serious scholarly consideration.

This thesis will address how Balinese custom, philosophy and gender values have shaped Balinese music and how music has in turn begun to reshape ideas of gender and custom, even as philosophical and spiritual values remain a strong and accommodating part of society and the arts. I will look specifically at these issues as they pertain to developments in Balinese women's *gamelan* groups. I am particularly interested in explaining their rapid growth and variation and how this relates to patterns of continuity and change that characterize many aspects of Balinese history and culture.

One of the central themes of the thesis is the sense of community and solidarity that are an integral part of playing *gamelan*. The power of unity is a key aspect of the potentialities of *gamelan wanita*. Although these groups were in many ways born of Indonesian government policy and its "women's emancipation" program,² the forces of solidarity within *gamelan* groups may eventually become strong enough to support a gradual *internal* reevaluation of customs of social association and identity.

The issues brought to the fore by developments in Balinese women's *gamelan* are an example of the issues discussed by Ellen Koskoff in her work which focuses on the musical activity and cultural identity of women (Koskoff 1987: xi). First she asks, "to what degree does a society's gender ideology and resulting gender-related behaviors affect its musical thought and practice? And second, how does music function in society to reflect or affect inter-gender relations?" (1987:1).

The issues that will be addressed here are relevant to women and men in societies world-wide. It is a fundamental assumption of this thesis that underestimating the significance of musical performance and musical groups limits our ability to understand human nature. The sense of community formed around something as profoundly moving and deeply spiritual as music is great indeed. In Bali, musical participation creates possibilities for growth and social adjustment appropriate to the needs and concerns of Balinese people and which come not from national or international agenda but from within the community itself. It is the power of community

¹The term *gamelan wanita* will be used interchangeably with "women's *gamelan*"

²This government program that maintains that men and women are equal. Nevertheless as Willner (1996 [1992]) points out the tenets for the government's programs for village women show their primary duties as mother, wife, and housewife, primarily responsible for raising children. She must also be useful to her country and community.

and complexity of the dynamics of *gamelan* groups that will be the focus of this discussion.

The feeling of community and importance, even urgency, that can be sensed in some women's groups suggests something about the women who have chosen to make the sacrifices necessary to take part in the time consuming, highly demanding and technically difficult activity of playing Balinese *gamelan*, despite its strong association with Balinese masculine gender values. Their decisions to continue and maintain groups, despite difficulties and challenges suggest that *gamelan* fulfills a strong and shared desire to play music—a desire at once spiritual, artistic, social and personal.

Until very recently, academic work has focused primarily on the male, public perspective, with little thoughtful consideration of the female experience. This has been as true in Bali as in other areas, and with some recent exceptions, women have been the beautiful color photographs set in a text based on the male experience. In addition, the development of women's *gamelan* is so recent and the dominant male forms of music so striking that it is not surprising that there is a paucity of literature on the subject. However, the rate and nature of development of women's *gamelan* make scholarly consideration imperative. I will comment briefly on some of the works that have directly addressed the issues surrounding women's *gamelan* in Bali.

Bapak I Ketut Yasa³ and his research team from Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Surakarta wrote the first book-length manuscript on the subject of women's Balinese *gamelan* (1993). It looks at *gamelan wanita* in the Badung regency. The work focuses primarily on groups that have competed in the Bali Arts Festival, some of which are no longer active. They compare both the active and inactive groups in terms of the motivation of the musicians as well as their individual social and economic environments. The work also includes a discussion of the repertoire and musical structure of pieces played by various women's groups. Interestingly, this volume, the first of its kind on the subject of Balinese *gamelan wanita* was produced by a team of researchers from central Java's Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Surakarta, rather than by the campus at Denpasar in Bali.

Another work of significance is Sarah Willner's paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Balinese Studies in Denpasar (Willner 1996 [1992]). Willner's extensive participant observation in women's *gamelan* in the region of Tabanan makes her work particularly interesting, as she is aware of the nature and complexity of the conflicts not merely theoretically, but as they manifest themselves in the daily lives of female musicians in Bali.

Willner looks at Balinese social and gender norms and their implications for women's *gamelan*, discussing women's *gamelan* both in the villages as well as the government schools. Her general overview includes a discussion of the role of govern-

³The terms *bapak* and *ibu* are respectful forms of address used in Indonesia for a person who is of an older generation than oneself. Informants of approximately my generation will be referred to by name alone. In citations, only "last" names will be used.

ment as well as the deep importance of the banjar and ritual systems of the traditional village to the development of *gamelan wanita*.

Michael Bakan's article (1997/1998), which focuses on women's *beleganjur* groups, is perhaps the most recently published work on the subject of women's *gamelan*. He looks at the complexities of the interaction between "...gender, Balinese cultural tradition and Indonesian national ideology in contemporary Balinese society" (Bakan 1997/1998: 37). *Beleganjur* is a Balinese musical ensemble characterized as the most masculine of the masculine.⁴ Thus it highlights dramatically the tensions and problems that arise when the Balinese ideals of femininity meet with a strongly male musical genre.

Bakan discusses the government's program to promote emancipation for women, arguing that women's *beleganjur* activities are one of the government's hegemonic tools which imposes national agenda on Balinese traditions. He also briefly discusses issues of style and gender norms, mentioning towards the end the possibility that women may someday be able to "influence the perspectives of other and to promote real change: musical, social even political" (pg.75). While Bakan's discussion focuses on *beleganjur*, the issues addressed are of interest to us here, particularly his allusion to the possibilities of expanding opportunities as activities in *gamelan* increase. However, Bakan focuses primarily on the problems and tensions between political and cultural powers of Indonesia and Bali, maintaining that the sociopolitical manipulation and hegemonic implications of *beleganjur* are of central importance (pg.73), and that despite its purported role in "emancipating" women, the government appropriates "culturally significant symbols of gender" (such as *beleganjur* as a symbol of masculinity) and manipulates them while in fact maintaining women's marginalized status.

These works, the few that have been written exclusively addressing women's *gamelan* activities in Bali, represent a range of perspectives by which women's *gamelan* can be viewed. Yasa et. al. look specifically at groups from Badung that have performed in the Bali Arts Festival. Bakan also discusses Badung but focuses on women's *beleganjur*, looking critically at political motivations and cultural tensions. Willner offers a broad perspective, discussing not only the "urban" groups in the Badung regency, but also those in more remote village areas. Among other things, she considers the issues that arise within the village and family. Though focusing on different areas, all these works share a strong concern for the social and cultural implications for women's *gamelan*.

Geographically, this thesis focuses on the regency of Gianyar with some references also to activities in Badung and Tabanan, The area I focus on has had a great deal of exposure to tourism and the tourist economy. The discussion will consider

⁴The "masculinity" associated with *beleganjur* stems from a number of factors, including its historical and ritual use, the processional nature of *beleganjur* performance, and the musical and visual aesthetics of the genre which call for very bold, "warrior-like" performance. See Bakan (1997/1998) for further discussion.

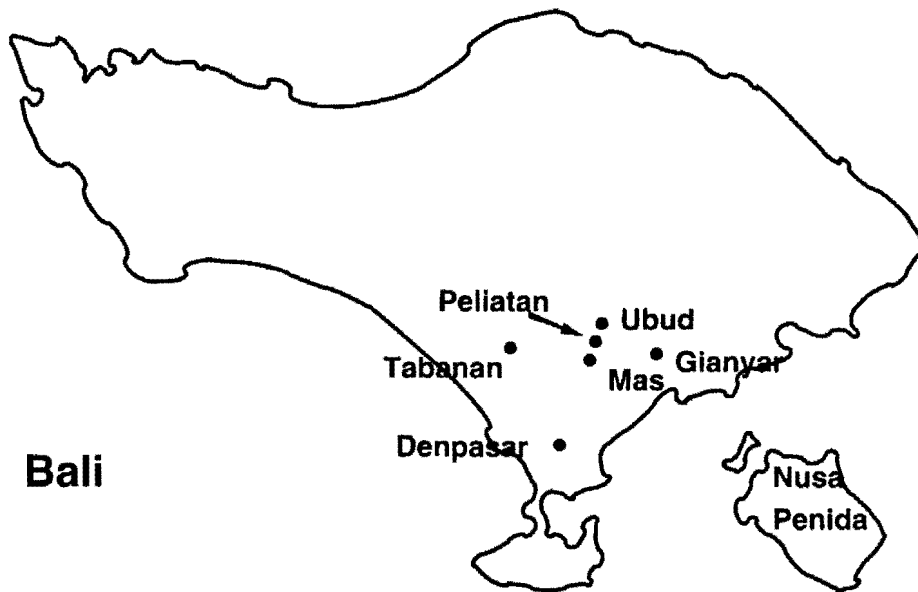


Figure 1: Map of Bali

the importance of government policy, but will focus on the problems and issues faced by village women and their groups. My experience studying Balinese *gamelan* both in the United States and in Bali convinced me that these matters must be considered in the context of Balinese daily life, religious philosophy, ritual, family, the personal connections that develop between musicians, the power of tradition and the power of music. My experiences have also made me sensitive to assumptions that the more powerful male population is the primary obstacle to the women's movement. In my own studies and observations, I have indeed experienced and noted times when the equilibrium between male and female concerns is full of tension, particularly with regard to *gamelan*. However, on many other occasions, the support and sacrifice of male musicians and teachers has been an absolutely essential and supportive force in the development of women's *gamelan*.⁵

The significance of the creation of a new kind of social and artistic group for women, based not on locality or kinship, but on the social and religious merit of music is profound. Though many forces still hamper the blossoming of the full

⁵See Sarah Willner's paper 1996 (1992) and Michael Bakan's article (1997) for interesting discussions regarding the tensions created as well as the sometimes cooperative nature of interaction surrounding women's *gamelan*.

female potential in Bali (as well as in the United States and other countries), the forming of such organizations, is perhaps one way that women will be able to make their voices heard. It does not entail defiant protest against the strictures of tradition, but the opening of doors which allow women entry into at least parts of that tradition. In the process, women gain the opportunity to become part of a new solidarity based on music.

1 Research methodology

This thesis is primarily based on work and study conducted in Bali during the fall of 1997. In addition, I was a student under the auspices of the Darmasiswa program (Indonesian Department of Education and Culture) at STSI Denpasar⁶ from August 1994–October 1995. This period of study was critical in my formulation of this discussion. I began to study Balinese and Javanese dance in Los Angeles at age fourteen and was raised with *gamelan* as an ever present entity, sometimes playing when an opportunity presented itself. I began to study Javanese *gamelan* more seriously as a student at the University of California at Berkeley with Bapak Widiyanto, and with the encouragement of Bapak I Nyoman Windha who was then teaching Gamelan Sekar Jaya, I became a student of Balinese *gamelan*. After years of studying *gamelan* and Balinese dance in the United States, I went to Bali, and upon entering my first *gamelan* class at STSI, I realized that in Bali, *gamelan* was really a man's world. Teachers and fellow students, however, were very supportive, and my studies continued.

During the fall of 1997, I resided in Banjar Pengosekan to study the phenomenon of *gamelan wanita*. With a population of about 800, it lies south of the tourist hub of Ubud and west of the village of Peliatan. Banjar Pengosekan is home to an active community of artists, painters, craftsmen/craftswomen, puppeteers, two *wayang kulit* music groups, one men's *gamelan angklung*, two men's *gamelan gong kebyar*, two women's *gamelan gong kebyar* and one women's *gamelan angklung* (six *gamelan* groups total). There is no shortage of artistic activity.

I lived with a family of artists well known for their musical accomplishments. Inside the house compound was a full set of *gamelan gong kebyar* instruments (borrowed from the Puri in Ubud) which was used by Sanggar Cudamani (a school for Balinese dance and music) and when there was a particularly tight rehearsal schedule, also by the women's *gamelan*, Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu. Otherwise the rehearsals for the women's groups took place across the street at the *bale banjar*.⁷ There were also children's (boys and girls) *gamelan* and dance classes held daily in the house compound. The drummers for the men's and women's groups lived in this house as did the drummer for the older but now inactive men's group. Eleven of the twelve

⁶Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Denpasar. The Indonesian College of the Arts.

⁷The *banjar* is a ritually, socially and geographically defined sub-set of a village. It also refers to the all male body that makes decisions that affect that area. The *bale banjar* is the central meeting hall for the *banjar*.

residents of the compound played, studied or had played *gamelan*. This household became the base for my work in Pengosekan. This in turn became the focus of my study which took me to groups in the regencies of Badung, Gianyar and Tabanan.

The first section of this thesis will provide a general background to the context in which women's *gamelan* originated. After this is established, I will move to a discussion of group formation in Balinese women's *gamelan* with a consideration of style and genre and, in particular the implications for female newcomers. The last sections will take us into a more detailed discussion of the philosophical, social and political implications associated with the formation of women's *gamelan* groups in Bali.

2 Background *Desa Kala Patra*: Continuity and Change in Bali

The term *Desa Kala Patra* embodies the need to take into consideration the conditions of any particular moment and to be able to accommodate those conditions in one's life. *Desa* refers to place (village); *kala* refers to time; *patra* refers to circumstance or situation. Thus, any action or thought must take into consideration the chronological, physical and cultural context in which that action takes place. For example, offerings are often made with sweetened rice cakes, however, if one is living in a place where one cannot make or buy such cakes, then one may use doughnuts. It does not sacrifice the integrity of the offering in any way. It is thus possible to have change without sacrificing the fundamental essence of something, as long as the "spirit" of one's actions do not change.

Changes in the Balinese performing arts take place as an integral part of Balinese history, which has been characterized both by dramatic change and a strong base of continuity. The arts are no exception to this pattern and perhaps are the area where outsiders can most easily see changes as well as preservation. As the arts in Bali are so much a part of *life*, I find that it is necessary to begin by commenting, even if briefly, on the nature and extent of this pattern of continuity and change that has been so much a part of Balinese history in ritual, politics, economics and the arts.

The political world of Bali has been characterized by change since the beginning of historical records, yet very old elements of Balinese custom (*adat*) persist today, and not only in isolated villages such as Tenganan or Trunyan. For our purposes one of the most interesting aspects of the political world in Bali is its close ties to the arts. While the arts have had a primary role in religious life, they were also a central part of court life and the courts were central to the life of the arts. As the political world changed, the arts adjusted.⁸

Incorporation into the nation of Indonesia changed the nature of political interaction in Bali, as the island was no longer an independent entity with regional kings and

⁸For discussions on the changes in the arts and its relationship to political and social change see Picard (1996), Susilo (1997), Wiratini (1991).

powers, but rather part of a nation state, under the legal control of Jakarta. Nevertheless, the arts have still maintained a relationship with the state, and although they are not under the direct patronage of a ruler, like the *gambuh*⁹ groups prior to World War II, artists still must answer to the ideologies of a political power.¹⁰

National government policy is thus a part of artists' lives in Indonesia, and Indonesian awareness of women's emancipation, even if it is substantially divergent from western ideals of the emancipated woman, has put women on the national agenda. I will not attempt to justify or criticize the national government's policies towards women. What is clear is that government support of *gamelan wanita* is related to the national policy towards women. Women were encouraged to play *gamelan* in the Bali Arts Festival to demonstrate that Balinese women are capable of playing *gamelan*, that they are able to do more than just work in the home (Suryatini, personal communication).

In addition to major changes in political power structure, some of the most significant changes in Balinese life have been economic. The inundation of tourists and tourist money and the conscious steering of the Balinese economy towards tourism and away from agriculture, has lead to an economy that is linked closely to the international market, and yet there also remains a strong system of reciprocal gifts and labor.

Tourism and tourist money have come to have a close relationship with the arts and artistic developments in Bali (Picard 1996). Many genre and styles of music and dance have been developed or altered to meet market demands. Due to the threats and opportunities presented by massive tourism in Bali, the Balinese intelligentsia are continuing to find it necessary to create divisions and boundaries across the spectrum of the arts, (Picard 1996: 152-163; Bandem 1995). Painting, playing *gamelan*, dancing and teaching were not an integral part of a cash economy until recently. Today groups rise and fall, unite and disintegrate because of the power of the yen, dollar, rupiah.

Bali's economic boom has created a lifestyle that is critical for our discussion, as fewer and fewer Balinese work in the rice fields (Picard 1996: 64). Tourism has brought in cash, and this has created more "free" time for both men and women (Oka, personal communication). Although in many ways Balinese women are now busier than ever, working in banks, hotels and offices, they are also able to ride a motor bike to work rather than walk six miles. They can work late in the evening, because there is electricity and lighting. They have cash and buy food and rice, rather than working in the fields. These developments, both technological and economic, form a new framework for women's activities unrelated to household duties.¹¹

⁹*Gambuh* is the oldest known form of dramatic arts in Bali, considered the predecessor to all forms of dance drama, and most forms of dance. It was long under the patronage of the courts of the Balinese kingdoms.

¹⁰See Picard (1996).

¹¹Bapak Dewa Nyoman Oka, personal communication. Also personal observation in Pengosekan.

Another significant development at once economic, political and social is increased access to education for both men and women. Like a strong economy, Indonesian education has brought in outside ideology and values. The involvement of government schools in the developments of women's *gamelan* will be a theme of this thesis. Education coupled with a strong economy made women's movement into *gamelan* an option that had previously been unimaginable.

Chapter two, "The Development of *Gamelan Wanita* in Bali" begins the discussion by examining the background for the emergence of women's *gamelan* in Bali. It will consider some of the many artistic activities that have long been a part of Balinese women's lives, such as the creation of offerings, singing in the temples, and dancing. It will continue with a more detailed discussion of the "history" of women's *gamelan* activities in Bali and how these *groups* were able to come into being, looking both at the role of government and of individual initiative.

Chapter three, "Individual Motivation and Group Identity", introduces a number of different "kinds" of women's *gamelan* and will look more closely at the motivations for women to play and to create *gamelan* groups. Chapter four, "The Art of *Gamelan Wanita*" will look at some tensions that must be taken into account when considering the artistic aspects of *gamelan* and how it interacts with Balinese ideals of the feminine. Issues of style, genre and repertoire will be discussed as they relate to *gamelan wanita*.

Chapter five takes us into the deep complexity of the relationship between *gamelan wanita* and some fundamental philosophical and ritual concepts that are critical to the existence of *gamelan wanita*. The social issues that arise as women move into what was male space will be discussed here, and we will look at two case studies to illustrate how different villages negotiated these changes.

Chapter six will look more closely at how *gamelan* is affecting women's lives on a personal and familial level. This section will use brief case studies to illustrate some of the difficulties that women and men must negotiate as women begin to create strong groups that cross traditional boundaries.

The future of *gamelan wanita* is still unclear, particularly with the current economic and political crisis in Indonesia. However, strong communities and continued dedication to ritual and religious service may aid women and men in weathering the national crisis and support *gamelan wanita* through the re-negotiation of issues of traditional gender construction.

The Development of *Gamelan Wanita* in Bali

1 Being a Woman in Bali

Being a woman in Bali has always involved some kind of “artistic” activity, both as an individual and as part of a group. In order to provide the artistic context in which Balinese women’s *gamelan* developed, I will briefly discuss some of “artistic” activities in which Balinese women have “traditionally” been engaged. These activities, with the exception of dance, are frequently peripheralized (if considered at all) in discussions of Balinese arts, not only by Western scholars, but also by many Balinese. This is not because these activities are insignificant. Perhaps because they have generally been activities that take place in non-public space, they have been overlooked or have been considered to be of minor importance. They often take place either in the home, or in the innermost courtyards of the temples, where women have long been active as weavers, as makers and carriers of offerings, as singers of *kidung*, and as dancers.¹

Women have traditionally engaged in artistic activities both as individuals and as part of a group. The preparation of offerings provides one of the most visible examples of this interaction. Women sit for hours, working quietly alone or in pairs, chatting, watching the children, using their “spare” time to create the small, basic elements of the offerings, preparing the fronds, doing the first cutting and folding of the small elements that will become part of the larger offerings. When Galungan² or a major temple ceremony approaches, preparations may begin weeks or even months in advance. When the day arrives, there is a bustle in the house as sisters, nieces, cousins, work together to assemble the numerous offerings, the elements of which have been prepared in advance. In preparation for a large temple ceremony, the *kulkul* will sound, calling all the women (or men, but each group arrives at a different time) to *ngayah*, to the ritual. In the temple they make the preparations for the ceremony together. When the *kulkul* sounds, a female representative from each house must meet her fellow village women, each carrying her own small knife, ready for the work that needs to be done.

The millions of offerings, great and small, that are made in Bali are much more than works of art and more even than acts of devotion; they are a way of living. To give a “brief” discussion of Balinese offerings is impossible. Let it suffice to say that every morning, and every evening each Balinese household must give offerings (and not just *one*, but some ten to thirty) in their house compound. These are the smallest, most humble offerings, each beautiful and essential. They are made and carried by women. At each temple ceremony, larger offerings of fruit and flowers are made,

¹Although I will not discuss them here, one of the most striking examples of women’s artistry is found in Balinese textiles.

²One of the highest Balinese holy days

and for major ceremonies, offerings with chicken, pig and other meats are created.³ Women are constantly busy making offerings, and while the “specialist” who directs the making of complex offerings for very high ceremonies may be male or female, it is the women who are strongly associated with the creation of offerings.

The time that a woman works is determined by the days of the Balinese calendar: temple ceremonies, full moon, Galungan, Kuningan and other holidays and ceremonies. Whether she works alone or in a large group depends on what is being made, the occasion itself. The group with whom she works, the group to which she belongs, is dependent on her *banjar*, which in turn is determined by her family, either by birth or marriage. When a woman marries, she becomes a member of her husband’s family and *banjar*. This is where she will make offerings for the rest of her life. The women of this family and *banjar* are the group to which she will belong.

It is in the temples of her village that a woman will perform another ritual and artistic activity that is even more strongly group oriented—singing *kidung*. *Kidung* is a form of poetic singing strongly associated with ritual and ceremony which women often sing in large groups while sitting in the innermost part of the temple, before actual prayers begin. Women sit, packed hip to hip, chatting, catching up on the latest news and singing *kidung* for hours before prayer starts. The *kidung* often begins with a single voice that is joined by dozens of others, one or another voice leading slightly, followed by a cloud of other voices.

Kidung may be sung at the same time the Topeng Pajegan (masked dance) is performed or when a *gamelan gong kebyar* plays in the middle courtyard during ceremonies which may last for hours at a time. As such, it is easy to overlook the fact that *kidung* is even happening if one is visiting Bali briefly, or if one is focusing only on *gong kebyar*. However, as a woman, even though I was very interested in *topeng* and *gamelan*, I was usually swept into the inner courtyard as the other women entered with offerings and children in hand. Over the temple walls, the sound of the *gamelan gong kebyar* was clear and loud. Sometimes in the inner temple a set of *gender wayang* would be playing, or in certain villages even an *angklung* ensemble. These were all played by the men’s groups. The women’s musical contribution was the *kidung*, and their voices formed another layer in the rich thickness of the aural and artistic experience of sitting in a temple.

In addition to singing *kidung* in the temple and at other ceremonies, women also sing as individuals in their own homes to their children and also as part of a group in the rice fields. Many are strong carriers of the folk songs that hold in their text the values and lessons of Balinese society that a small child must learn from an early age. Children often learn these songs in schools now, and the rice fields have fewer and fewer young women working in them. Just one generation ago, the performers

³Brinkgreve’s book (1992) discusses Balinese offerings and includes beautiful photographs of a variety of offerings.

of *arja*⁴ a form of Balinese danced opera, whose performers are highly trained, were selected in the rice fields, where teachers would keep an ear out for men or women who had exceptional singing voices. The auditions, so to speak, were in the harvest.

This brings us to the discussion of women as dancers. This has probably been the area where Balinese women have received the most attention. In addition to giving offerings of fruits and flowers, of voice and song, both Balinese men and women have long given offerings of dance as part of the ritual cycle. Women have most likely been dancing *rejang* and *pendet*⁵ since before the Majapahit period⁶ (approximately fifteenth century), for the roots of these temple dances are old and deep.⁷

Rejang and *Pendet* are dances usually performed in large groups within the innermost part of the temple, but sometimes they move to the outer areas of a temple. These dances, particularly *rejang*, are fundamentally different from those that are commonly seen in tourist shows throughout the island. The dancers may be restricted to the very young and/or the very old, or may be open to any women present at the temple at the time of the ceremony. Although, there are some exceptions, generally dancers do not *study rejang*, in the same way that they may study Oleg Tamulilingan or Teruna Jaya,⁸ but rather learn by following older, more experienced dancers.⁹ In general, however, the most important aspects of *rejang* are not the "performance" but rather the act of devotion that the dancing embodies. To dance *rejang*, to play *gamelan* in the temple, is the same as to pray and to give offerings.¹⁰

It has only been during this century that women have moved into "performance" dance, that is forms that are performed outside the temple for entertainment. Until early this century women dancing as "entertainment" were tainted with the connotation of dancers hired out by the court for more than visual or artistic forms of performance.¹¹ However, in the last eighty or ninety years women have become highly trained and highly respected dancers and teachers of dance, and this has im-

⁴*Arja*, blurs the line between singer and dancer as skills in both are essential to being a successful performer. Bapak I Wayan Dibia gives a comprehensive discussion of *arja* in his dissertation (1992).

⁵*Rejang* and *pendet* are two anciently related, but distinct forms of dance that are offered as part of a ceremony.

⁶There was extensive interaction between Bali and Java, particularly during the period of the reign of Airlangga (r.991–1049) and the Warmadewa dynasty. After the decline of Warmadewa, there was a decline in interaction until the rise of Singasari and Majapahit (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries) in East Java, when interactions were again intensified. See Claire Holt (1967) and Adrian Vickers (1989).

⁷See Bandem and DeBoer (1995) for a comprehensive discussion of various genre of Balinese dance.

⁸Pieces from the *kebyar* genre, developed in this century, which require a high degree of technical skill and training and which are often performed as "entertainment" both for tourists and at temple ceremonies.

⁹The exception is often in villages that take particular pride in their dancers and dance tradition (such as Peliatan or Ubud) where trained dancers will practice extensively if there is a large ceremony that will require a *rejang* performance.

¹⁰Based on personal communication with I Dewa Putu Berata

¹¹Ibu Ni Ketut Arini Alit in Willner (1996 [1992] : 138). See also Bapak Dibia's dissertation (1992).

portant implications for the development of *gamelan wanita*, for many members of were dancers in their youth. Suffice it to say that although women have only been "performers" of dance for a few generations, the level of skill and depth of artistry attained is undeniable. Thus, when musicians today say that the next generation of (female) musicians may be dramatically better than the current generation,¹² they are saying so with the knowledge of the history of women's expanding role in the performing arts.

In addition to dancing, a few women in this century have become shadow puppeteers. In the 1970's one of the first female puppeteers was beginning to perform regularly. However, the weight of familial obligations once she married, coupled with the problems of ritual pollution posed by menstruation, made regular performances difficult (Suryatini, personal communication). This is a problem faced also to some extent by women in all performing arts. While this puppeteer is no longer active, Ibu Candri, from the village of Singapadu is a respected performer of *arja* and performs *wayang* with increasing frequency. As an older women, she may more easily pass across the boundaries of "male" and "female" both practically and symbolically. Nevertheless, *wayang kulit* remains a largely male domain.

Though perhaps less visible than men, women have long been active in the realm of the Balinese arts. Their artistic activities have had strong ties to ritual life. This is true for both men and women and is perhaps one of the great sources of strength for Balinese Hinduism. Involvement in ritual activities, whether in the temple or home, are an inextricable part of life for both men and women. However, this does not mean that participation or access to ritual power has been equal, for women face certain unmistakable obstacles.

One major obstacle is the menstrual cycle. The ritual pollution associated with menstruation bars women from the inner courtyards of the temple for several days each month. A woman's menstrual cycle in Bali has a profound effect on the rhythm of her ritual life, and because the arts were born out of spiritual and ritual beliefs, this impacts on female relationships with the arts.

Gamelan wanita groups usually perform "entertainment" in the outermost courtyard of a temple compound. Even though technically one should not give any kind of offering while menstruating (including a performance), at least a woman does not pollute sacred space sitting in there. This makes the performance easier to present than a *wayang kulit* which might take place in an area where even the presence of a woman during menstruation would seriously jeopardize the ritual purity of her surroundings and could have serious repercussions for the woman herself.

In music, however, it has been mostly custom, rather than religious belief that has simply maintained playing *gamelan* as a man's activity. As far as my research and experience in Balinese *gamelan* reveal, with some exceptions, it is not that women

¹²This was an opinion expressed to me by several informants among them I Dewa Putu Berata and I Dewa Ketut Alit.

were forbidden from playing *gamelan*, they just *didn't*; *men* played *gamelan*.¹³ So custom and, as we will see in chapter six, familial obligation, have often made access to certain activities severely limited. However, because women have long been highly active in service to the temple, making offerings, dancing, singing *kidung*, the ability to perform service in another way, through playing music, became popular very quickly once the idea took hold. Let us turn to the brief history of women's movement into the world of Balinese *gamelan* and how *gamelan* groups came to be formed.

2 Development of *Gamelan Wanita* Groups

How did women's *gamelan* groups come to be formed? Who and what were the necessary supporting factors and forces that helped women's *gamelan* achieve its current position?

Before the 1950's there is no concrete evidence of the existence of women's *gamelan* groups. There are images of women playing *gamelan* instruments in illustrations from the 19th century. However, it is unclear whether these are depictions of a real tradition of women playing *gamelan* that may have been lost, or a symbolic representation of the male and female aspects of the creation of music in *gamelan* (Vickers 1985: 157–159).

Recent research has demonstrated that in the 1950's there was a pair of women who performed *gender* (Yasa et. al. 1993: 52), one of the most technically demanding instruments of Balinese music. *Gender* is played in pairs or quartets, unlike *gong kebyar* which is played in large ensembles of 25–30 musicians. Thus, two women playing *gender* would have comprised a complete ensemble. We see that perhaps women's initial movement into music was made by a few exceptional individuals.

These women played only for *manusa yadnya*¹⁴ ceremonies, rather than for *wayang kulit* performances (Yasa 1993: 52). This is significant both from the musical (technical) point of view as well as from the ritual point of view. Musically, it is more demanding to play for *wayang kulit* performances, because accompanying such performances requires the ability to perform a large repertoire, a familiarity of the language used (one based on literary Sanskrit) and a knowledge of the characters and stories of *wayang kulit*. Ritually, it is extremely difficult for women to accompany *wayang kulit* for the same reasons that it is difficult for women to become shadow puppeteers. Thus, playing for *manusa yadnya* ceremonies is both technically and ritually less complicated than playing for *wayang kulit*, and also implies that women are playing in a relatively "private" sphere, usually in a house compound.

Thus, there were women playing *gender* as early as the 1950's,¹⁵ and this may suggest the possibility that some women were active in music even prior to that,

¹³Oka; Wija; Berata, personal communication. See also Bakan's discussion.

¹⁴Ceremonies related to human rites of passage, such as tooth filing and marriage.

¹⁵Interviews and discussion with informants revealed that few were aware of women playing *gamelan* before the 1970's or even 1980's.

though perhaps in very small numbers. However, we still have no concrete evidence of full ensembles before this period. If there were active women's groups prior to the current wave of activity, they are not in the conscious memory of most female musicians in Bali today.

The introduction of communication technology and transportation has played a significant role in the rapid development of women's *gamelan*. In addition, it is clear that the Indonesian government's national agenda has had a profound impact on developments in women's *gamelan*. One of the most important forces in Balinese *gamelan* since 1963 has been SMKI (Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia), formerly KOKAR (Konservatori Karawitan), the high school for the arts in Bali and the Indonesian College of the Arts, STSI (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia) formerly Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia (Indonesian Academy of the Arts), in Denpasar.

For *gamelan wanita*, the classes held in the 1960's which required young girls to take *gamelan* as part of their curriculum, were critical. At that time, all students were to study both music and dance. "Dancers" and "musicians" were in the same class, and girls were expected to learn to play all of the instruments, just like their male counterparts.¹⁶ A number of the most prominent female musicians, such as Ibu Ketut Suryatini and Ibu Desak Suarti Laksmi were students at KOKAR in these early years. For these two women, KOKAR was a supplement to a very strong musical education they had received at home from their families. However, for many other young women, it was a very important introduction to the practice and the very concept of playing music.

In addition to its significance as a place of learning music technique, the school also allowed these young women to make contacts with one another and seek out others who were interested in playing *gamelan*. Ibu Suryatini (personal communication) points out that most of the members of Puspasari, one of the first women's *gamelan* in Bali, were classmates from KOKAR. Thus government schools became a place where young women could begin to meet others who would, because of common interest and talent, become members of their musical community. This allowed women to begin to form ties outside of familial and *banjar* relations—ties and communities based on music.

Banjar and community ties, however, remained (and remain) critical in the formation of women's groups. This was apparent as one of the earliest groups began forming in the 1970's in Nusa Penida, the small island just off of Bali's southern coast. Bapak I Wayan Dibia reports having seen a group from Nusa Penida perform

¹⁶This has changed somewhat, as students must select a "major", and usually young women opt for "dance" rather than *gamelan*. Curriculum changes in the last decade have thus actually diminished young girls' exposure to playing *gamelan*. There has been an increased attention to non-artistic studies, such as math and history, and consequently the amount of time that students have to study the practice of the arts has decreased. This, however, is a separate discussion. For our purposes, it is significant that in the 1960's KOKAR required its students, both male and female to study and play *gamelan*.

in the late 1970's and that at that time they had already achieved a relatively high level of performance. This small community was one of the first supporters of women's *gamelan*, and this was almost certainly independent of government schools of official initiatives. By its very existence, and because of subsequent Balinese "mainland" interest, this group became a significant force in the development of larger, more complete groups of women *gamelan* musicians. Interestingly, Bapak Dibia notes that this original Nusa Penida group now has young girls who are learning to play *gamelan* (personal communication). These girls are being taught by their mothers, just as most young boys are taught by their fathers.

While Nusa Penida's women's group was practicing, another group was forming on Bali's mainland. Puspasari, formed in 1980, became highly influential in the development and growth of women's *gamelan*. Ibu Ni Ketut Suryatini and her brother Bapak I Wayan Suweca organized this group around a group young women at KOKAR as well as Rachel Cooper and Lisa Gold who were members of Gamelan Sekar Jaya in California. Initially, there were also a few men. However, the latter were temporary members and were replaced as Ibu Suryatini and her "fellow" musicians sought out young female musicians to fill out the rest of the group (Suryatini, personal communication). In the 1980's Puspasari made an appearance on Balinese television that was broadcast across the island. To this day it is still remembered by those who saw it—women, playing *gamelan*....on television! If the pair of *gender* players were little known even to their neighbors in the next village, the women of Puspasari, with the aid of modern technology, were known across Bali.

In 1987 the women's Gamelan Mekar Sari was founded in the area where my research was focused and is the longest continuously active women's group in the Ubud area. This group is comprised of women from various *banjar* of the Ubud area who meet each week for their tourist show in Peliatan.

This development coincided with official encouragement. In 1985, after seeing a performance of women's *gamelan*, Bali's Governor Ida Bagus Mantra decided that women's *gamelan* should be included in Bali's annual and highly prestigious Bali Arts Festival. This government-sponsored festival is extremely popular and is well attended by Balinese audiences. The most popular performances can draw thousands of enthusiastic fans who pack the stands, aisles and walls of the various pavilions used for performances.

Since the 1970's men's *gamelan* competitions have been held in this arena, sent by local Balinese government offices to represent their regency. Regional pride and politics are as hot as the musicians on the stage, and the artists perform with "take-no-prisoners" excellence and at a level of technical skill and spirited dedication that is difficult to imagine. The slightest slip is jeered wildly by the opponents, a particularly splendid passage cheered on enthusiastically. It is a far cry from the relaxed, but solemn spiritual dedication with which these musicians can play in a temple, and although the temple performances are always at the heart of Balinese *gamelan*, the Bali

Arts Festival competitions are at least one major center of attention for the general Balinese audience. And in 1985, Bali's local government figures decided that women would play *gamelan* at the Festival.

This was a watershed for the development of *gamelan* wanita. Each year, between 1985 and 1997 every regency of Bali was required to have a women's *gamelan* *gong kebyar* group in the island-wide competition. Although not all of these groups appeared at the Art Center in Denpasar, every year, an intensive training session took place in each regency to train a women's group. The prestige and sense of "duty," of having been appointed by the government to represent the village, gave these training sessions a weight and priority unprecedented for women's *gamelan*.

Clearly, the influence of international "democracies" is reflected in the idea of women's emancipation, although the actual practice is far from equality. Nevertheless, the idea of emancipation is foremost in many minds, whether they agree, disagree, or are simply confused. Women's emancipation was part of the impetus for including women's *gamelan* in the Bali Arts Festival. The women's *gamelan* competitions were to demonstrate that women are capable of doing what men do, and what better example for the Balinese public than *gamelan*, which had for so long been the unquestioned domain of men? The official government party line,¹⁷ the high profile venue of the Festival and the raised levels of education, combine to make it increasingly difficult for even the most conservative men to deny women access to *gamelan*.¹⁸

The inclusion of women's *gamelan* competitions was critical in raising awareness of the potential and real achievements of women in *gamelan* on a scale much larger than would have been possible otherwise. As we will see in chapter three, many of these "competition groups" are no longer active, and retired after a short and intense life. Nonetheless, the Bali Arts Festival was an unmistakably significant power in raising the frequency and quality, not only of women's performance, but of women playing *gamelan*, whether in performance at the Festival, in intensive rehearsals, or at the local temples. The high profile *competitive* nature of the Festival meant that women were now being trusted to "represent" their regency, and even more importantly, their village and *banjar*, by playing *gamelan* in front of hundreds, even thousands of *gamelan* fans.

The Bali Arts Festival also created unexpected ripples when the first American Balinese *gamelan*, Gamelan Sekar Jaya, was invited to perform in 1985. This group, comprised of American men and women made appearances in various areas of Bali, including the Festival. It is impossible to judge exactly what the impact of the ap-

¹⁷There is at least one instance when the ruling Golongan Karya party made a "contribution" to several village women's *gamelan* groups in the Gianyar regency. These contributions were made just prior to elections and were used for costumes. One group was already established, two or three others were "being planned" and began rehearsing after the GOLKAR contributions were received. Personal communication, I Made Sukadana.

¹⁸Nevertheless women are not *guaranteed* access by any means.

pearance of men and women playing together might have been, but the balance of competency between the male and female musicians in Sekar Jaya was (and is) often noted by Balinese musicians. Among the members of this group were Rachel Cooper and Lisa Gold, who had also played with Puspasari. In later tours, women played key leading instruments, such as drum and *ugal*¹⁹ and thus appeared not only as musicians, but as leaders of an ensemble which included men, something virtually unimaginable in a Balinese group at this time.

Nevertheless, while the Bali festival and outside ideas most certainly had a profound impact on the development of women's *gamelan*, the government or outside (induced) activity would not be enough to maintain a women's *gamelan* tradition without the real commitment from the Balinese women themselves. This is evident in the disintegration of some Bali Arts Festival groups which, as we shall see in chapter VII, has been used to justify the government's subsequent decision to discontinue the *gong wanita* competitions at the Festival in 1998.

In the late 1990's it is not the Festival competition groups that are the most active, but rather the numerous very low-profile *gamelan* groups that have begun to spring up and take root. It is these groups, usually formed through village women's groups (PKK—pendidikan kesejahteraan keluarga) or through individual initiative, that are of particular interest to me. PKK are government programs in the villages that were created to "educate" women on family welfare. These groups are now seen as the complement of the men's *banjar* organization, though the PKK has little decision making power in the village. Nevertheless, the PKK, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, can make "statements" related to *banjar* politics, and they organize their own activities which increasingly include the study of *gamelan*. PKK groups are neither required to nor prohibited from playing *gamelan*. If they form a PKK *gamelan*, comprised of members interested in *gamelan*, then it is out of their own desire to do so, and is probably related to their ability to motivate local musicians to teach a women's group.

The existence of the PKK *gamelan* and the *sekaa* (clubs), both of which require women's initiative and persistence to form and maintain, demonstrate that playing *gamelan* is not simply something that women are told to do by the government, but more importantly is something of great artistic, spiritual and social power. In the areas of my research, this type of *gamelan* was gaining tremendous popularity.

Thus, Balinese women's *gamelan* groups have been born out of a tradition of strong female spiritual artistry that has come to meet with a changing social, economic, technological and political environment. Balinese women have been weavers, creators of offerings, singers, and dancers and have now begun to form and maintain *gamelan* groups. Before playing *gamelan* women had experience working as individuals and in groups to create the arts that most often became their offerings to the ritual cy-

¹⁹Centrally positioned instrument that leads the metallophone (*gangsa*) section.

cle. The groups in which women work have long been based on *banjar* membership, which is in turn based on kinship/marital relations.

Whether women were playing music prior to this century is unclear, but there is some evidence that when women first began to move into instrumental music, it was as individuals or pairs playing in household compounds, fairly small and safe environments. Later, with government schools, young women were able to meet other women from different areas who shared talent or interest in *gamelan*. Schools became a significant "meeting ground" for female musicians. The Bali Arts Festival was a major watershed for women's *gamelan* and literally put women's *gamelan* in the limelight, before thousands of cheering spectators.

Women's groups began to form slowly, and recently they have grown considerably popular at the village level, away from the Bali festival and government schools. In the late 1990's there has been a virtual explosion of women's activities in *gamelan*, and the area of growth has been at the "grass roots" level, inspired and initiated by women. In some areas, local men's *gamelan* groups have been openly enthusiastic, but the development of women's *gamelan* has also been accompanied by some serious tensions. *Gamelan* has become the arena for the sometimes difficult and delicate negotiation of social, political and personal changes, as the forces of national, international and personal agenda encounter and negotiate with a strong sense of social order and propriety.

The very existence of *gamelan wanita*, the playing of *gamelan* by women (or men) is strongly supported by and in turn supports the strongest of all these forces—ritual tradition and spiritual and religious belief. Balinese Hinduism remains the inextricable base for these negotiations. In it, we find a continuity of values and ritual much stronger and more flexible than any outside "agenda". This is the foundation over which the forces of change and conservation interact, and upon which the eventual compromise of human negotiations will rest.

Group Identity and Individual Motivation

This chapter will introduce the numerous ways in which women's *gamelan* groups have emerged. The groups that will be introduced here differ from one another not so much in instrumentation, but in their structure, their membership and in their very reason for existence. Some of them are part of the governmental body that has allowed women to enter into the world of *gamelan*, and others have been created by the women themselves in a manner similar to the formation of many men's groups. These various groups will be introduced here, together with some of the motivations that have moved women to play *gamelan* and in some cases to form their own groups.

Before I begin that discussion, however, it is relevant to reflect on how women's recent activity in Balinese *gamelan* is at once a major change for the Balinese arts and at the same time, a development that is consistent with ancient beliefs and institutions. Let us look first at how women's *gamelan* represents a change in Balinese performing arts. In the next chapter, we will address the way in which *gamelan wanita* is nevertheless also consistent with "tradition."

The very presence of women behind the instruments of a *gamelan* was a departure from the norms of Balinese music, and to watch/listen to and/or participate in a women's *gamelan* is a distinctly different artistic and social experience from watching or playing with a men's *gamelan* or with a *gamelan* with both male and female musicians.¹ In addition, there has been an almost startling rise in the numbers of active *gamelan wanita*, and in the last few years, they have been expanding into different genre of Balinese *gamelan*. While government policy certainly opened this door of opportunity, I would argue that this boom has in large part been the result of increased interest on the part of *women*, rather than increased pressure on the part of the government or other "outside" forces. Balinese women have become increasingly assertive and bold in expressing their desire to play music, to the point of openly asking highly respected teachers to teach them, an act of open assertion that might have been impossible just one generation ago (Rai, personal communication). They are spending their own money to buy costumes, spending their time organizing activities and developing larger networks of artistic connections (between villages and groups) that extend far beyond the household. It is this increase in activity and broadening of the range of activities that is of great interest to us here.

¹Ibu Ketut Suryatini commented on the difference in how she felt when she played with a women's group as compared to her experiences playing with mostly male groups. Ibu Suryatini is one of a relatively small group of Balinese women who are able to play on an equal with men's groups such as those of STSI as well as with a group sent abroad by the government in 1997. She pointed out that the speed and power with which a men's group plays is very different from the women's groups, and also that the "feeling" of the music and how the male musicians "feel" the piece was dramatically different from the women that she played with.

1 Group Identity

The coordinated group, with a common goal, infused with the spirit of great dedication and sacrifice is a source of strength for Balinese women, and the importance of finding this solidarity, be it through music, singing, working together in a factory or reading poetry, goes far beyond Bali's temple walls. The desire of Balinese women to take into their own hands the direction and course of their artistic lives is telling evidence of the power of the arts to unite and bring out the strength and courage of people previously marginalized. As in their other activities, Balinese women have the potential to play *gamelan* with the dignity, grace and powerful beauty that is part of the spirit of Balinese arts.

Let us look now at the various forms that these *gamelan* may take. They represent a range of levels in technical skill, and membership is determined by various factors, from residence and interest to employment, skill, talent and desire. However, making clean distinctions and descriptions of these groups is extremely difficult, as there are endless exceptions and new developments as the women themselves further expand and develop existing structures for playing *gamelan* in order to meet their needs. Thus, I distinguish these, not to imply that there are clear boundaries, or that groups do not share characteristics, but rather to introduce the complexity and rapidity of developments in *gamelan wanita*. Four kinds of groups may be discerned 1) "*dharma wanita*" groups, 2) Bali Arts Festival groups...all-stars and *sebunan*, 3) PKK groups at the *banjar* and 4) *seka gamelan wanita*

Dharma wanita refer to the women's organizations that are associated with a particular government office or institution. All female employees and all wives of male employees of a particular institution will become members of that institution's *dharma wanita*. This group has numerous activities such as bazaars, cooking demonstrations and more and more frequently, *gamelan*. There are similar *gamelan* groups, which are not *dharma wanita* in that they are not associated with a government office, though they are associated with the work place, for example, a *gamelan* group formed by the female employees of a particular bank. They are similar to *dharma wanita* in that membership to the *gamelan* is contingent upon one's employment at that institution.

Nevertheless, groups that are actually *dharma wanita gamelan* groups are unquestionably under the auspices of the Indonesian government. They are not an organization developed by local Balinese for the village. They are the female auxiliary group for a government institution and as such are strongly influenced by the Indonesian government's official "line". Thus, as the government has encouraged women to play *gamelan* at the Bali Arts Festival, it has also encouraged them to play in other contexts, for example, as part of the *dharma wanita*'s activities.

Dharma wanita groups are often taught by teachers from the Indonesian College of Arts or from the High School of the Arts (STSI and KOKAR respectively) or by graduates of these schools who are employed in other sectors of the government's

civil service. For example, an STSI graduate may be unable to find employment as a music teacher or musician and may accept a desk job at a government office. If at some point this office begins a *dharma wanita* group, this person may be appointed to teach and direct the group. Ibu Suryatini, who is a teacher in STSI's department of music, (*gamelan*), teaches a *dharma wanita* group in Denpasar, one of the few instances of a woman acting as the primary teacher for a women's *gamelan* group.

There are also the PKK groups. In their structure, organization and membership, PKK *gamelan* groups are in many ways "traditional" and have developed in ways that are *banjar* inclusive, based on support from the *banjar* itself. PKK groups take their membership from a particular *banjar*'s PKK organization, although not all members of the PKK are members of the "Gong PKK". Members of a PKK group are married women of the same *banjar*, and the *gamelan*'s activities are focused around the temple and the process of learning itself. PKK groups are the least formal in that they generally do not perform for large audiences, but rather play at local temple ceremonies. However, if their village is a large one, and there happens to be a major temple ceremony, this can be of great significance. For example, the four month old PKK *angklung* group of Ubud Kaja played *rejang* and *pendet*, two dance pieces essential to the enormous 21-day temple ceremony that took place in November, 1997.

PKK group teachers are not paid and are usually members of that *banjar*'s men's *gamelan*. The PKK groups at this point exist mainly to accommodate the desire of the members to study *gamelan* and to allow them the opportunity to play *gamelan* as ritual service for a ceremony. Playing and studying *gamelan* is accepted as one of the PKK numerous activities, like exercise teams and the singing of *kidung*. The government keeps no official records of these groups at present.

In contrast to the PKK groups, the membership of the Bali Arts Festival groups is not necessarily based upon lines of kinship or *banjar*, but rather take into account musical talent and ability. Because the Bali festival is such a high profile event, there is a concerted effort during these competitions to bring together the strongest group of musicians possible. In some areas this has meant "borrowing" musicians from various villages, to put together a kind of "all-star" women's *gamelan* group that performs under the name of a particular village. There are still relatively few female players who are accomplished on instruments such as the drum, *ugal*, and *trompong*,² and the musicians for these positions are often "borrowed". This sort of borrowing is not uncommon in men's groups, and the result is that in both men's and women's groups, the same key musicians are sought out year after year.

These "all-star" groups often reach levels of performance exceptional by any standard, and they are a "model" for other groups, because of the quality of their perfor-

²The *trompong* is a row of knobbed "pot" gongs that are played by a single musician. The *trompong* not only elaborates on the melody, but like the *ugal*, it serves also to lead the musicians through particularly difficult and lengthy melodic passages.

mance, the difficulty of their repertoire and their exceptional stage presence.³ Nevertheless the one critical weakness of these groups lies in their very all-star nature. The musicians come from various villages and *banjar*, and once the competition is over, and normal life resumes, many of these groups disband or become inactive, until competition calls them into action once again. Thus, some of these groups found their lives only in the competition of the Bali festival (Yasa 1993).

Another kind of group that has begun to compete successfully at the Bali festival are *gamelan* organizations that are often termed *sekaa*.⁴ These are groups that are based in a particular *banjar* or village but which may not be formally organized as a *banjar* group. They do not belong to the *banjar*, but rather, are independently organized. These *sekaa* may participate in the women's *gong kebyar* competitions at the Bali festival, but are not necessarily of the "all-star" variety. Rather they may be *sebunan*, that is, all the musicians are from the same *banjar*. Among the most notable of the *sekaa gamelan wanita* are those of *banjar Anyar*, *Perean*, *Abdi Budaya*, of *Sebatu* in Gianyar, *Gamelan Mekar Sari* of *Peliatan*, and *Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu* of *Pengosekan*.

Sekaa is the term used generally in Bali for a cooperative group that has one activity or related activities that they share in common and can be loosely translated as a "club".⁵ Unlike the *dharma wanita* or PKK organizations, which are government-created women's organizations that engage in numerous activities, sometimes including *gamelan*, the *sekaa* are organizations whose primary activity and reason for existence is to practice and play *gamelan*. They are different from groups that organize for the express purpose of performing at the Bali Arts Festival, because generally competition is not their goal, but rather the maintenance of a group that will practice and perform *gamelan* for ceremony at the highest musical level possible.

Coordinating non-*sebunan gamelan* groups (that is groups whose members are from different *banjar*) is often more complicated than coordinating a *sebunan* group, usually for practical reasons of communication, transportation, ceremony, household and work duties. In addition, because the *banjar* is such a powerful social and religious entity, ceremonies and social obligations from the *banjar* generally take precedence over activities with a group outside of the *banjar*. As Yasa et. al. point out (1993), although Badung has given consistently excellent performances at the Bali Festival, the fact that the musicians of these groups are not all from one *banjar* puts them at something of a disadvantage when it comes to maintaining ties after the competitions are over. In contrast, areas such as Gianyar and Tabanan have taken longer to de-

³This has in fact, become a rather delicate issue, as the prominence of these groups, the intensity of the competition, combined with the fact that the competitions seem to favor a particular "style", has led some to be concerned that this has in fact led to a homogenization of dance and music, as groups from all of Bali's regencies, forgo their regional style because of the island-wide competitions.

⁴Also spelled *seka*, *sekeha*, *sekha*.

⁵The term *sekaa* is rather problematic as it does not always refer exclusively to a *sebunan* group and is used differently in different regions. I will use it here to discuss this specific kind of group formations, although in some regions an alternate term may be in use.

velop strong women's *gamelan*, but now have several strong *sebunan* groups that have performed in the Bali Festival and continued to rehearse and perform long after the festival competitions had concluded.

Of the above mentioned groups, Mekar Sari actually has members that are from various *banjar*, but all from the same area. For years they have come together to perform their weekly tourist performance. They are respected in their area as the first strong women's group that has truly endured. The *gamelan wanita* Abdi Budaya of Perean is a strong *sebunan* group that held regular hotel performances and has been invited to play at numerous important government functions. In addition, they have been invited to represent their regency in the Bali Arts Festival four times.

Often *sekaa* such as these are formed on the initiative of one or a few individuals who have decided that they would like to form a group, usually to perform ritual service (*ngayah*) in the temple. It is because of the initiative and perseverance of such people that many of these groups are able to survive the turmoil and sometimes outright disapproval members may face. In Pengosekan, the women's *sekaa* have a great deal of independence. The head, one of the female musicians, and the members themselves have the right to accept or decline invitations to perform, as well as the right to accept or deny a particular individual's membership in the group. They may also, at times, invite "guest musicians" to come and play with the group if they are taking on a particularly difficult repertoire.⁶ In other villages, this is not the case, and the women's club may be like a branch of the men's club, with all decisions in regard to performances requiring approval by the men. Although the degree of independence of a *sekaa* varies greatly, because these groups are focused exclusively on the study and performance of *gamelan* and dance, the quality of their performance is generally quite good. Their repertoire can be large, including technically difficult pieces, both "traditional" and new compositions.

How and *why* did this confusing array of groups form? To understand these developments, it is necessary to appreciate that the interaction between individual motivation and group identity and desire is critical. Indeed the very *creating* of a group of women, based on ties other than birth of marriage is a very powerful concept that may be giving a new perspective to the meaning of boundaries, loyalty and identity.

2 Motivation

Numerous forces, some obvious, and some extremely subtle, underlie the process by which women's *gamelan* groups are formed. In many cases, the Indonesian national government and its doctrines have played a significant role in the creation of these large, complete *gamelan* ensembles (see Bakan 1997/1998). In addition, the strong

⁶Pengosekan's Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu, invited a woman from Bangli who was studying at STSI, to play with them as a drummer for the *topeng* (masked dance) repertoire that they were developing.

support of the *banjar* system can also be critical in making the continuing life of *gamelan wanita* possible (see Willner 1996 [1992]). My observations suggest that also of critical importance is the motivation of the players themselves.

At a very basic level, the question arises as to what inspires these individuals to play music, to sacrifice so much time, energy, and in some cases to jeopardize their very "femininity" to play *gamelan*? It is of course impossible to know the justification or reason that inspires each individual. However, a number "reasons" for playing were put forward in my discussions with musicians and teachers, and many of these reasons incorporated philosophical concepts of social values that are not at all at odds with Balinese ritual tradition or Balinese custom.

Some musicians, such as Ibu Suryatini and Ibu Desak Suarti Laksmi were raised in families with highly musical environments, and had an interest in music from an early age. Likewise Ibu Arini is both a respected musician and dancer, and one of the most highly sought out teachers on the island. These women and others like them are not simply pawns of the government. They are serious teachers and artists who work intensively in the refinement of their arts.

Other women, who may not be from families of musicians, simply want to learn how to play the music that they have heard since childhood. One young women in Pengosekan reminded me that there are many women who just want to learn to play *gamelan*. That was why the PKK of Pengosekan formed a new group, the second *gamelan wanita* in their *banjar*. Apparently, there was not enough room to accommodate all the women who wanted to study, and because the older group already performed regularly, newcomers (who didn't have technique training) would be difficult to incorporate. The women therefore decided to form a second group that would accommodate the beginners who just wanted to learn how to play *gamelan* (Sueni, personal communication). In a place where, "going back to school" is a rare concept, the desire to begin to study *gamelan*, the desire to just *learn* to play *gamelan*, is powerful. I should note also that it is extremely rare to have more than one women's group in one *banjar*. The fact that they were forming a second *gamelan wanita* was amazing,⁷ and as will be discussed in chapter VI, there are now *three* active women's groups in Pengosekan.⁸

In addition, there are strong social and personal motives for women to play *gamelan*. The ties between social life and artistic life are again a strong continuous presence, found both in men's and women's Balinese *gamelan*. Yasa et. al. (1993) con-

⁷The formation of this second group, however, was not without difficulties and tensions. These were not between the men and the women, but between some of the women themselves. When one male teacher of the (older) group commented on the situation, he lamented the tensions, and commented that some were involved in personal rivalries that were being brought into the *gamelan*. This was something that he regretted, because otherwise the fact that there were two women's groups in their village would be something that should be a source of great pride for everyone. Dewa Putu Berata, personal communication.

⁸Interestingly, these groups have a strong sense of loyalty within their own group and a mild sense of rivalry with the other groups.

ducted a survey of reasons that women's play *gamelan* (forty surveys were distributed), and though the study is limited, it does indicate that the social aspect of playing music with a group of women is something that has substantial meaning. *Gamelan* rehearsals provide an opportunity to gather with friends, for hours on end, to play music, laugh, chat, gossip, and simply be together.

One thing that cannot be overlooked is that women's *gamelan* has a certain cache for many Balinese women in the 1990's. It is rather fashionable. Women are playing *gamelan* on television, in the temples, on the stage. They look good and sound good. Playing *gamelan* is something that young modern married Balinese women do. So, "why don't we have a women's *gamelan*" is a question frequently posed by those whose villages are without such groups (Rai, Raka, Berata, personal communication).

Overall, the most powerful motivation is the desire to give music performances in the temples, to perform as part of ritual duty. If these women are busy making offerings, carrying them to temple, spending hours and days in preparation for ceremonies, sitting together singing *kidung* in the temple, why then do they look for yet another way to give service? Perhaps dance, *taksu*⁹ and *ngayah* are part of what bring these artists to the stage as musicians.

The mention of *ngayah*, ritual service and work, was virtually inevitable in conversations I had about *gamelan wanita* with women, and interestingly, it was often contrasted with motivations for performing at the Bali Arts Festival. The head of Seka Gong Mekar Ayu's maintained that they had no intention of performing at the arts festival, that they just wanted to be able to play *gamelan* and *ngayah*.¹⁰ This attitude was not uncommon. This sentiment was reflected in statements made by almost all of the informants with whom I spoke.

The ability to give a performance as an offering is a motivational force for virtually all artistic activity, but *gamelan* is a particular kind of performance that seems to be attracting certain kinds of women. Many *gamelan* musicians in my area of study were dancers as young girls, and now, after marriage, or after reaching an age where they no longer feel comfortable dancing in public, they have put their strong artistic energies into playing *gamelan*.

Many Balinese girls and young women are able to give offerings of dance starting at a very early age. With the boom in tourism, female dancers have been staying active longer in order to perform for tourists. However, it is still generally more common for dancers retire as performers at marriage, if not before. The weight of familial obligations coupled with a sense of embarrassment and shyness at performing at such an "advanced" age are still usually strong enough to discourage all but the most dedicated dancers from dancing in "public" once they have children.

⁹*Taksu* is a term for which we have no translation in English. It is a divinely granted inspiration that makes a person charismatic, attractive. While it can be operative in daily life, in performance and on stage it is mesmerizing and incredibly powerful—a kind of "mana."

¹⁰Gusti Ayu Raka, personal communication.

The performing life of women thus is substantially shorter than that of men,¹¹ who generally continue to perform long after marriage though for men also it becomes more difficult to be fully engaged in these activities after children have been born into the family. Musicians in particular can have a very long performing life, and as in the case of Pengosekan's *sekaa* may slow down their performance schedule, not because they are embarrassed or shy or incapable of performing, but because the next generation of musicians is reaching an age (maybe their teens) where they are seen as able to play sufficiently well to replace the older group. In some areas, this transition happens gradually, in some the "adult" group turns the reigns over to the "youth" group, who are from then on considered, the "adult" group.

Until recently, such a long career of "performance" has not been possible for women. Although older women do perform *rejang* in the temples, for "middle aged" women there are few opportunities to perform an offering, to *ngayah*, with a performance. Playing *gamelan* is a way that mature, married women are able to perform *ngayah*.

For almost all of the women I spoke to (particularly those who were living in "villages" as opposed to the "city") the study of *gamelan* and the creation of a group was motivated by the hope of giving performances in the temple. In a way, there is a highly selfless justification for creating and maintaining a group, and indeed, many members and groups make substantial sacrifices economically, in terms of time and in energy, to give a performance at a temple.

In villages such as Peliatan and Pengosekan a large percentage of the musicians were dancers when they were younger. Thus, as is frequently noted by their teachers, even though their technique playing the instruments may be less than optimal, they have a strong stage presence; they know how to perform. Furthermore, in relation both to the arts and spiritual belief, many of these performers are recognized as having great *taksu*. Through playing *gamelan*, they have been able to reenter the performing arts, to give the offerings that are perhaps most demonstrative of their spirit, that allow their *taksu* to be present and to be part of their ritual offerings.

In summary, if we examine the development of *gamelan wanita*, we see that the growth and expansion is impressive, in terms of the numbers of women playing and in the variety of arrangements that structure the groups. There are *dharma wanita* groups associated with the work place, there are PKK groups based in the women's village organization, there are Bali Arts Festival all-star and *sebunan* groups that compete in the highly prestigious Bali Arts Festival, and there are the *sekaa* that form of individual initiative and that exist to play *gamelan*. The strong motivational powers

¹¹Bapak Dibia elucidates an interesting contrast in the performance lives of *kebyar* dancers and *arja* dancers. Female *Arja* dancers may perform well into mature adulthood, while female *kebyar* dancers often stop dancing by their thirtieth birthday at the latest. *Arja* requires highly specialized training and there are far fewer *arja* dancers than there are *kebyar* dancers. See his dissertation (1993) for further discussion.

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that support women as they take on this endeavor into male territory are critical and reflect women's individual desires as well as values that have long been powerful forces in Bali.

The Art of *Gamelan Wanita*

1 Performing as a Group

There are a number of issues that arise when women begin to perform an art form that has been dominated by men. This chapter will address questions of style, genre and repertoire in relation to Balinese constructions of gender as they have arisen in the context of *gamelan wanita*. It is in these areas that we see the Balinese ideals of feminine demeanor meeting the aesthetics of a music that has long been an exclusively male activity. We also see the problems that arise as women are judged by and judge themselves by criteria established by a male tradition. This chapter will point out areas where women have gained respect despite these terms, and the power of performance beyond technical skill.

Because women generally do not play at the same speed¹ and level of technical complexity as men, women's *gamelan* are often considered less than aesthetically pleasing and generally inferior to men's *gamelan*.² Despite this, *gamelan wanita* are appearing with increasing numbers. Let us consider first the question of style raised by women playing *gamelan*.

If we look at "style" several interesting questions present themselves. Do women have or will they develop their own style? What of the issue of the ideal feminine beauty and propriety in Balinese custom? How is this reconciled with playing instruments or entire genre of *gamelan* whose technique and nature are sometimes at odds with those ideals?

Let us consider first the question of the development of style on an individual level. For example, in drumming or playing *trompong*, a number of women have developed a "style" of playing a particular instrument. These women are highly trained virtuosic players such as Ibu Ketut Suryatini, Ibu Desak Suarti Laksmi, and Ibu Ni Nyoman Suati. Clearly one must have mastered the technique of a particular instru-

¹It is interesting to note that what appears to be a steady push for faster tempi and more complicated ornamentation in music for the men's *gamelan* is a rather recent development, perhaps within the last two decades, and was unlikely to be a requisite part of older pieces. This affects new compositions as well as the interpretation of older pieces, and speed has become of prime importance. For example, the village of Pengosekan's men's group today plays at markedly faster tempi than they did just fifteen years ago, even with the same musicians and comparable *kebyar* repertoire. I make this passing mention of the question of the importance of tempo only to suggest that playing at the astounding tempi of many *gong kebyar* ensembles today, may be a recent development. Thus, when women are compared to the "speed" standard of men, they are being compared not to an ancient sacred tradition, but a rather new taste for fast and complicated music. This is based on observations of the men's *gamelan* in Pengosekan in 1997 compared to a recording of the same group (with many of the same musicians) in 1987 when they took first place at the Bali Arts festival. There are, however, still villages that prefer slower, less dynamic playing styles.

²See Bakan for a discussion on this topic

ment to begin to develop a personal style. More importantly, for Balinese women, one must be bold enough to be selective rather than simply accepting everything that is taught and imitating the teacher (Berata, personal communication). Going beyond what one has been taught and even consciously *not* incorporating something one has been taught, can be quite difficult when one dances or plays before one's teachers and the peers of one's teachers. Thus, the development of individual style is limited to a few exceptional individuals, and I would argue that this is not untrue of men's *gamelan* also. Those women who have their own "style" are those whose talent, skill, training and individual personalities have allowed them to be pioneers in their field.

Nevertheless, if we look at "style" for *gamelan wanita* groups, it is still an extremely high compliment for a woman or a women's group to be said to "play like men." Willner (1996 [1992]) brings up the question of whether Balinese women will develop their own style of playing as have Javanese women's *gamelan* or whether they will play what she terms aptly, "*gamelan lite*", a simple or simplified men's style, taking much of their repertoire from simple children's dances.

However, there are other groups that confront the challenge directly, such as Puspasari which played pieces Legong Kraton and Teruna Jaya (Yasa 1993). Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu plays *petopengan* pieces (for masked dance) which, because of their interaction with the dance, are particularly challenging. The dance pieces are not set choreographies, but rather a set of idioms that can be arranged according to a basic structure. The performance on any particular occasion varies according to the demands of the temple situation or the dancer's feeling and inspiration at the moment. The drumming and interaction between dancer and musicians is critical and playing in such styles is quite demanding.³

In any discussion of musical style, whether a *gamelan* group is playing technically difficult or simple pieces, the drums and drummers require special consideration. Playing loud percussive instruments is already at odds with Balinese ideals of feminine demeanor, but Balinese women have also had to consider techniques as basic as how to hold the drum (Willner 1996 [1992]: 139). Most female drummers in Bali now sit cross-legged (*mesila*) with the drum on their laps. Here the tension between Balinese ideals of femininity and musical necessity are clear. In Bali, it is rather coarse for a woman to sit cross-legged in public, although in Denpasar, I observed dance students sitting that way in studio situations. In a formal, public situation, such as a performance, it is highly unusual and undecorous for a woman to sit any way except with her legs tucked under her (*metimpuh*). It is virtually impossible to play a Balinese drum on one's lap sitting in this position. The drum rolls off. However, to sit cross-legged was until recently, rather awkward not only for women to do, but for people to witness. It is just too "manly." It was proposed that women play with the drum

³It is possible to "set" the music and choreography, thus relieving the musicians of the need to react to spontaneous action on the part of the dancers. In the 1995 Festival *Gong Wanita* in Gianyar the groups performed this kind of *petopengan*. However, this is far from an ideal situation.

on a stand, as Javanese drums are played (Willner (1996 [1992]): 139; Yasa 1993), but Balinese drums are not Javanese drums and playing with the drum on a stand appears to have been a highly unsatisfying option. All female drummers that I saw playing were sitting cross-legged for rehearsal as well as in performance.

Thus, despite suggestions that a woman can play the drum “politely” and use a stand so she can sit neatly, women have taken the drums onto their laps and in doing so, have willingly sacrificed their “feminine” sitting posture in order to play a way that is more satisfying. The music and playing it well was more powerful than the discomfort entailed by sitting cross-legged. Willner discusses the issue of women’s style in her paper, and I should note here that it seems as though female drummers sitting cross-legged is now accepted as fairly normal.

Regardless of how one sits, whether “like a man” or “like a woman,” demeanor is a critical part of performance style. That is, no matter how one sits, or how one plays, one must look very good doing it. Women seem to have established that although sitting cross-legged is generally unfeminine, they can incorporate it gracefully into their performance, and thus it can be accepted. The physical appearance of a group, whether male or female is of utmost importance, and both take great care in preparation for their performance.⁴ This can become a source of tension with musicians’ husbands (as it has long been with musicians’ wives). The need to not only sound good, but also look good is important and coupled with frequent trips out of the village and the presence of male teachers, can lead to suspicions of infidelity (Willner (1996 [1992])).

2 Gender and Genre—*Gamelan and Wanita*

I will now consider the problem of gender and genre in terms of what women are playing and how various genre meet or challenge criteria of proper female decorum. However, it is necessary to emphasize that there is no *one* “Balinese ideal of femininity” and that the “ideal” is often *not* reality. Women in Bali have traditionally worked in the rice fields, carried heavy loads of water (and now cement, as Willner (1996 [1992]) points out) and taken on numerous physically demanding tasks. Although women are generally the keepers of the home and should not visit other villages alone, there are always exceptions and reworking of the “rules,” particularly now among the younger generations of Balinese men and women. Nevertheless, there are some ideals of “feminine” that we can use for discussion, such as diligence in the home, temple and *banjar*, polite hospitality, respect for one’s parents, older siblings and husband, caring for children (although this is a responsibility that is in many ways shared more equally in Bali than in the United States) and a generally humble

⁴I shared a bathroom with a family that had five–seven actively performing young men, and one of the women drummers. Although I never timed their “dressing time”, the men were notorious for the extreme care that they took bathing and preparing for performance.

and sweet demeanor. The wide variety of musical genres to which women now have access, highlight the different problems that arise when gender norms conflict with musical expression and style.

To my knowledge as of 1997, women are actively playing *gender*, *beleganjur*, *angklung*, and *gong kebyar*. Each of these genre have a distinct feeling, flavor, color, aesthetic. Female musicians are clearly aware of this and treat the genre differently. As dancers and makers of offerings, most female musicians already have a strong understanding of Balinese aesthetic goals, of style, the differences between genre and an understanding of what is entailed in performance.

Gender, whether played for *wayang* or *manusa yadnya* ceremonies is the smallest and perhaps most subdued and delicate of these four ensembles and involves ambidextrous damping and playing, interlocking with a partner and playing the melody at the same time. *Gender* is generally played for ceremonial, rather than touristic, touring, or competitive performance purposes, and as such generally takes place inside the temple courtyards or in a home, a context that, although alive with ceremonial activities, may not been seen as “public” in the same sense as the island wide Bali Arts Festival competitions. Thus, although the technique is very difficult, the highly religious ties and usually low profile position in performance of *gender* has, render it more compatible with Balinese ideas of femininity, and a sense of Balinese female beauty can be maintained while displaying great musical skill.

Beleganjur, is an extremely strong, loud, walking ensemble which involves the clanging of thick cymbals, carrying heavy gongs and marching through the streets making a lot of noise and attracting considerable attention. Such behavior is truly at odds with Balinese ideals of feminine demeanor. *Beleganjur*, like *gender*, also has strong ties to religious life, however, it plays a rather different ritual role. Nonetheless, the government has recently encouraged women’s *beleganjur* by sponsoring women’s *beleganjur* competitions, although the propriety of women playing such an “unfeminine” form of music is a source of some debate and discussion amongst some Balinese artists and scholars (see Bakan 1997/1998).

Women’s *angklung*⁵ has also begun to develop, and in the Ubud Pengosekan area where my research was based, two women’s *angklung* groups are now active.⁶ *Angklung* is a full ensemble of some twenty musicians, but like *gender* it is more gentle in temperament, and thus is quite different from *beleganjur* or *gong kebyar*. This is the genre most recently incorporated into women’s repertoire. Because it is unusual for either men’s or women’s *angklung* groups to participate in competition or to travel long distances to play in hotels for tourists, *angklung* remains a strong musical force in

⁵*Angklung* is an ensemble that, like *gong kebyar* is comprised of metallophones, gongs and drums. *Angklung*, however, uses the *slendro* rather than *pelog* tuning used by *gong kebyar*, and its instruments are much smaller. *Angklung* has traditionally been used in association with rites for the dead, such as cremations.

⁶My research reveals that before 1997 there were no women’s *angklung* groups active in South Bali.

the villages. This is particularly evident during cremation ceremonies, where *angklung* has its most important roots and function.

Let us look finally at *gamelan gong kebyar*, a genre that has become extremely popular since its birth in North Bali at the beginning of this century. Appropriately named, *kebyar* means “explosion” or “flash of light and heat.” *Gong kebyar* swept over the entire island like wildfire, and is now the most common and most often seen and heard genre of Balinese music and dance. Characterized by dramatic and sudden changes in tempo and dynamics, it is flashy and complex. By far the most popular genre of men’s *gamelan*, *gong kebyar* ensembles can be found throughout the island and *gong kebyar* instruments are the most numerous.

At this time, the large majority of women’s *gamelan* are women’s *gamelan gong kebyar* (also known as *gong wanita*). This deserves an explanation because the flash, speed and stylishness that many *gong kebyar* musicians strive for is in many ways far from the ideal of the sweet and gentle housewife. In any genre, when a good drummer or *ugal* player, male or female, takes the stage, he or she must be a clear and bold leader, confident, strong and capable of controlling the situation. These characteristics are a central part of the Balinese traditional construction of masculinity, and are in rather strong conflict with the Balinese ideals of femininity.

The popularity of *gong wanita* is due in many ways to practical considerations, such as the availability of *gong kebyar* instruments and teachers. In addition, as the newest of these four genre, *gong kebyar* has a fairly wide margin for experimentation, thus as Bakan (1997/1998) points out, it may be easier to accept women playing this genre as it has been characterized by bold changes. In addition, of course, the annual Bali Arts Festival competitions were for women’s *gamelan gong kebyar* and not women’s *angklung*. Consequently, it is in this area that women have become most active, other genre may be more harmonious with Balinese values of feminine dignity and beauty.

In addition to playing style and genre, repertoire is an interesting area of discussion, as pieces may have a range of “spirit” and “feeling” that can be interpreted by musicians. As Willner points out, *gamelan wanita* is not a women’s music per se (Willner 1996 [1992]), and the pieces in most women’s groups’ repertoires are taken from the standard repertoire used in men’s *gamelan*. On the other hand, some pieces have been composed specifically for women’s groups, usually in preparation for the Bali Festival competitions. In Pengosekan, one such piece, “*Tari Kreasi Duku Pari*”, composed by Dewa Ketut Alit for the women’s Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu in 1997, was recently also adopted by the men’s group of Pengosekan. This may be the first, or at least one of the first examples of a piece that was originally composed for women being included in the men’s *gamelan* repertoire. Although this piece carries many of the characteristic idioms of the “new creations” (*kreasi baru*) genre, Alit did compose it for the women’s group and selected melodies and interlocking patterns that he felt would fit with the spirit of the women’s *gamelan* that he was composing for (Alit, personal communication).

The range of repertoire for any given *gamelan wanita* varies greatly. Some groups, such as Gamelan Abdi Budaya, Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu, and to some extent Gamelan Mekar Sari, have a full repertoire of pieces, "traditional" and "new creations", both dance and instrumental. Because of their large repertoire, these groups may be invited to perform for temple ceremonies in other villages, or sometimes will develop regular tourist shows. If they perform at the Bali Arts Festival, the pieces set as "standard" or required at the festival may sometimes become part of their continuing repertoire.⁷

Other groups, such as the PKK groups generally have a smaller repertoire, and may perform in their own village, but are unlikely to play elsewhere. One of the factors taken into consideration is the time and expense involved in giving a *ngayah* performance, so that the members of the committees organizing the music and dance for a particular ceremony will consider not just the group's "entertainment value," but also the amount of effort required to play just two pieces. Usually the groups that are invited to play are those that have a "entertainment" repertoire with *kebyar* standards as well as some "new creations". A full performance may be an hour and a half to two hours, and may involve dancers both from the women's group as well as from the host village.

Among the factors considered when determining the repertoire of a specific program are, of course, technical ability, the "place" where the group will be performing (that is, pieces appropriate for the ritual context in which they will be performed), current repertoire available (pieces performed at recent competitions are often chosen), "balance" (some new pieces, some classic pieces) and the desires of the members and teachers of the group.

As groups such as Seka Gong Mekar Ayu mature and become more confident, the women may begin to make fairly clear statements about the kinds of pieces that they would like to study and perform. When a group is just beginning, it generally accepts whatever the teacher or teachers decide for its repertoire. As technical skill and experience grow, however, the women are becoming more active in deciding the repertoire.

In these decisions, the "leaders" of the group are critical in working toward consensus. This emphasizes the importance of key individuals, both in performance and in the development of women's *gamelan*. The great female musicians, such as Ibu Ketut Suryatini, Ibu Desak Suarti Laksmi, not only lead their own groups but also pioneer new areas, as composers and teachers. Ibu Desak is a composer and dancer and has taught *gamelan* and dance to American students at Michigan Institute of Technol-

⁷The impact of the annual competitions of regional style is beyond the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, even at this early stage in women's *gamelan*, it is clear that the competitions at the Bali Arts Festival have an influence on the repertoire of some women's groups, perhaps implying that were the women's competitions to continue they would be even more strongly influenced by the festival's standards than men, and perhaps face a greater challenge in maintaining a regional style for women.

ogy, perhaps the first Balinese woman to teach *gamelan* internationally. Other women, such as Ibu Desak Nyoman Suarti and Ibu Ni Nyoman Suati, have become sources of personal inspiration for both the men and women around them as they forge through the many challenges that face any pioneers within a tradition.

Such women remind us that the issues are not simply “Balinese femininity” and “Balinese *gamelan*” in the abstract. There are individuals who have made lifelong commitments to women’s activities in *gamelan*. These people have become the drummers and *ugal* players, both literally and symbolically, of women’s *gamelan* in Bali. Despite conflicts between stylish, showy and bold and demonstrating a sweet and humble demeanor, these women are living examples of a joining and remixing of these aspects of their music and custom. They have helped to create a music and a lifestyle that reflects a harmonious incorporation of musical and cultural values, rather than a need to select one over the other.

These women have *taksu*, that divinely granted inspiration, charisma, power that distinguishes the truly great dancers and musicians from those that are merely excellent. *Taksu* takes them beyond the literal interpretation of music to the performance of something that truly is divine. It is an essential element of being a great leader and a great *gamelan*. Despite all of the difficulties they face, women’s groups can have *taksu*. After watching the women’s *gamelan* in Pengosekan perform numerous times, and after speaking to the teachers and other members of their village, I realized that it is not their technique, but their strong confidence and boldness in performance that makes them exciting and powerful, and it is their *taksu* that makes them great.⁸

⁸This is based on numerous discussions with Dewa Nyoman Oka, Dewa Putu Berata and Dewa Ketut Alit of Banjar Pengosekan.

Beyond the “Art” of the Arts

In this chapter, I will address some of the many issues that lie beyond the artistic aspects of *gamelan wanita*. The implications for women’s activities in *gamelan* Bali are varied and far reaching. Here I will attempt to address only a few of these issues, including the ramifications in the spheres of 1) religion and philosophy, 2) “space” social relations. Any one of these would be an area which could be discussed at great length. However, at this point, given the limited amount of research that has been done, it seems that our discussion will be most fruitful if we look at all of these together, as they are inextricably bound to one another in daily life. A consideration of these factors, albeit brief, will assist us in gaining a better understanding of the implications of *gamelan wanita* for Bali. In addition, it will help cast light on the power of music and community and the way in which social change may come about, not through outside government or international agenda, but through music.

1 Religion and Philosophy

The first and most important thing to be considered when looking at virtually any “traditional” form of Balinese art is Bali’s religious and philosophical environment. Others have looked at this extensively (Eiseman 1990). Here I emphasize only the concepts that influence the performing arts specifically and that are particularly relevant to our discussion of women’s *gamelan*—*rwabhinneda* and *ngaturan ayah* or *ngayah*.

Let us begin with *rwabhinneda*, which has become familiar through Eiseman’s (Eiseman 1990) work as well as that of others dealing with Balinese religion and philosophy. *Rwabhinneda* is the concept of complementary, different and essentially the same parts that make up a balanced whole. It is a concept important not only in philosophy, but in daily life. It is a concept of parts that fit together to create a whole; parts that are different, but actually the same in essence, and it shapes social interaction as well as the arts. As such a fundamental philosophy of life, it will be significant in our attempt to understand male-female relations, which is in turn essential to our understanding of the complex issues that arise when large numbers of women begin to play *gamelan*.

The most obvious examples of *rwabhinneda* are dualities such as male-female, night-day, black-white (as illustrated together in the checkered cloths. In music, the concept of *rwabhinneda* permeates many aspects of *gamelan*. Most of the instruments are paired; for example, the drums and gongs are male and female, the female having a slightly deeper sound than the male. In addition to the drums, the metallophone section (*gangsa*), row of knobbed pot gongs played by four musicians (*reong*), and melody carrying instruments are also paired.¹ The off-tuning system (*ngumbang-*

¹Michael Tenzer, *Balinese Music* (1991), gives an excellent discussion of Balinese *gamelan*.

ngisep), where one member of the pair is tuned slightly higher than the other creates the "beats" in the resulting sound waves when the instruments are played simultaneously. This results in the "shimmering" of Balinese *gamelan* and is a classic example of *rwabhinneda*. Interlocking of numerous instruments, where each plays a different part, but each is complementary and incomplete without the other, is another clear example of the philosophy of the importance of complementary action and existence.

Both the male and female, the male and female instruments, must be present in the *gamelan* in order for the ensemble to be complete, and the relationship between the drums is particularly interesting. In older pieces the male drum leads, while in the newer *kebyar* genre, the female drum becomes the leader, perhaps because it offers a stronger "boom" when struck. Interestingly, because he/she must be in control, the leader is more restricted than the drum that is not leading. Generally both drummers improvise, but the leader takes primary responsibility for controlling the ensemble and the partner that assists has more freedom. Playing both requires great technical skill and a strong understanding of the music, however, each instrument also requires a special skill and mental aptitude for that particular part. They are telling examples of the way in which complementary parts can be the same but different.²

There are also instruments in the ensemble which are considered more "masculine" or more "feminine." For example the drums, which lead with rhythmic precision and personal persuasion are considered quite masculine, while the the spike fiddle (*rebab*) with its lyrical melodic quality is more feminine. When the entire ensemble is female, it is easy for a general audience to expect a woman to play spike fiddle, perhaps because the sound is so close to singing, than to expect her to be a drummer or to be playing the loud clanging cymbals (*ceng-ceng kopyak*).

The strong concept of masculine and feminine in *gamelan* offers endless sexual innuendoes when sitting amongst these interlocking male and female instruments. With their multiple elongated and pointed beaters, "blowing and sucking" (the literal translation of *ngumbang-ngisep*), interlocking and various gongs with nipples and ridges—these instruments are not just instruments and playing *gamelan* is not just about music. The male and female, the masculine and feminine (and the many areas in between) are recognized and reinterpreted in the performing arts of Bali.³

Thus, in *gamelan*, as in society, the masculine and feminine are elements that permeate virtually all aspects of life and society. One of the strongest emblems of the elements of the necessary complementary coexistence of masculine and feminine is Dewi Saraswati, the lovely and powerful goddess of wisdom, knowledge and the arts.

²I am indebted to Bapak I Wayan Wija for helping to clarify the concept of *rwabhinneda* for me, and I also thank I Dewa Putu Berata for his contributions to this discussion on the philosophical concepts manifested in Balinese *gamelan*.

³I will not discuss here the forms of dance which depict characters that have both strong masculine and strong feminine powers, and often depict strong female characters or refined male characters, however the repertoire is extensive and a very interesting area of study.



Figure 1: Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati

She is of great importance to all Balinese artists and interestingly, is often portrayed in paintings as a delicate and beautiful woman, bearing the symbols of knowledge (sacred books inscribed on palm leaves) and the arts (usually a spike fiddle) and wearing a male headdress (see figure 1). Interestingly, she is also often referred to as *Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati*, even though she is a goddess and "Aji" is a term of high respect usually reserved for men. Thus, like many Balinese Hindu gods and goddesses, she bears the attributes of both masculine and feminine strength.

The complementary nature of male and female is expressed through individual or paired action (marriage) as well as *group* action. In social interaction, the strength of bonds within same sex groups or at least the strength of the group is clear in people's daily interaction (Willner 1996 [1992]), in the way people work, the way children play and the manner in which official organizations are structured. For example in the temple, it is the men who gather the various materials needed to create offerings, but the women who make them. When women began to play *gamelan*, they were taking on a "job" that was the same rather than complementary. Thus, when men's and women's groups play in the temples, the situation is, unlike when offerings are made; here both are performing the same duty in the same way.

Even though, as Bapak Wayan Wija points out, "work" roles are not prescribed by *rwabhinneda* (personal communication), the customary patterns of labor division are very strongly rooted. Women playing *gamelan* has disturbed some people's sense of balance between masculine and feminine roles. *Gamelan*, of course, is not the first, nor will it be the last arena in which tensions have arisen. Women becoming dancers at the beginning of this century and later working outside of the domestic economy also crossed gender lines and moved into what was male space as the world for Balinese women has expanded. Now, as in the past, there is a period of adjustment and a series of negotiations that engage the practitioners, supporters and critics of women's *gamelan*. It is therefore impossible to suggest that there is one way in which *gamelan wanita* groups manifest themselves, for in each village, each household, there are special considerations which must be taken into account.

This takes us back to the question of continuity and change in the Balinese performing arts. The presence of masculine and feminine power in *gamelan* is unmistakable regardless of whether women or men play. The instrument, the musical ornamentation, the basic concepts of *rwabhinneda* within the *gamelan* itself are still essential. What is changing is the sex of the players themselves, and as we will see, different villages attempt in different ways to resolve what I perceive to be a change in the "complementary" balance.

To better understand the "role" that I refer to and the "work" that has been mentioned, it is necessary now to look at the value of *ngaturan ayah*, or *ngayah*. To *ngayah* is to perform a kind of ritual service, usually for a temple or ceremony, without the intention of receiving monetary compensation. Much of tourist visitor fascination understandably focuses on the brilliant and indeed awesome aesthetic factor of the

Balinese arts, which can be simply overwhelming. Much academic work further more, succeeds in discussing the arts and their spiritual significance with little mention of *ngayah*. There may be a reference to “performing in the temple,” to trance and symbolic ritual significance, but these convey little understanding of the depth of the meaning of these offerings to the artists themselves. The discussion of the religious or spiritual side of Balinese arts is usually limited to trance, and perceptions of offerings are usually limited to material offerings of fruits, flowers, and meats (or animal sacrifices) that are given at the temple. These are discussed separately as though they were not related, as if dance, the arts, offerings, and religious devotion were not intimately intertwined with each other and with *ngayah*.

Therefore, a discussion of the importance of *ngayah* is in order, as it is such a central part of the lives of all of the serious artists whom I have had the pleasure of knowing in Bali. *Ngayah* can refer to a number of different kinds of work, from sweeping the temple, to making temple ornaments from palm fronds, to dancing, to playing *gamelan*. Thus, the old man who sweeps the temple every morning and the young girl who stuns the researcher with her spirit and technical skill are both performing *ngayah* for the temple. There is a tremendous amount of time, energy and often money involved in preparing and performing *ngayah*, both on the part of the receiving temple and on the part of the performers. For a large ceremony a committee will coordinate the performances for the duration of the temple ceremony, which can last up to 21 days. The performances that take place for a temple ceremony are not just “performances” and the arts are not just “art.” Nor are they mere entertainment; they are ritual offerings, and they are *work*.

The value of *ngayah* is central to our consideration of *gamelan wanita*, and is perhaps the strongest tie of “continuity.” To perform and prepare for *ngayah* is not just playing music for fun, nor is it art for art’s sake. To *ngayah*, in any form, is something that is considered inherently “good” and a requisite activity of both men and women. Thus, while there may be disagreement or even opposition to women playing music in hotels or for tourists, it is very problematic for Balinese to attempt to disrupt a woman’s efforts to *ngayah*, and such an attempt is likely to meet with disapproval from peers (such as other musicians).⁴ Nevertheless, there are still significant examples of women’s groups being prohibited from playing even *ngayah* performances.

If we look at the activities of most women’s groups, the overwhelming focus of their activities are *ngayah* performances. Some of the more mature groups with larger repertoire may also play for special government occasions, for tourists or for the Bali Arts Festival, but *ngayah* performances are more important, more frequent and a much better reason for a woman to leave her household duties.⁴ Women’s groups will generally rehearse and perform when it is the “season” for temple ceremonies, and

⁴The women’s group Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Sari of Peliatan is an unusual case, where a women’s group performs a weekly tourist show.

they will have opportunities to play. When it is not the "season," they may rehearse less frequently. Thus, the rehearsal and performance season of women's *gamelan* often parallel the season for temple ceremonies.⁵

The spiritual, ritual and customary significance given to *ngayah* performances, is one of the strongest sources of strength and support and even justification for women's *gamelan*. The government also provides an official theory of equality that, in theory, supports such activities. However, this is a new, outside policy recently imposed and not founded on local custom. The importance of *ngayah* on the other hand, is deep, old, strong and very alive, and it is the opportunity to *ngayah* by playing *gamelan* that has inspired many groups to form and has provided justification for the creation and maintenance of women's *gamelan*. This deeply rooted custom and the value given it are signs of strong continuity in belief and at the same time, a great source of energy for this new development in the arts.

Ngayah performances take place in the vicinity of the temple (or a house compound), sometimes within the temple, but more often in the pavilion just outside the temple, where *ngayah* performances oriented towards the entertainment of the human audience, but still considered offerings to the temple "entertainment" are performed. The rehearsals generally take place in the central gathering place for the group's *banjar* (*bale banjar*). Thus, as women perform their *ngayah* with *gamelan* they begin to move into a different space.

2 "Space" and Social Relations

I will discuss very briefly the issue of "space" here, both in terms of the negotiation of a psychological or emotional space as well as the actual physical space to which women have access, and the larger social implications.⁶ If we look first at the emotional space, the "space" that we are so familiar with in our daily Western lives, the delineation of space is of course, quite different in Bali. However, it is clear that when women play *gamelan*, they move across the invisible but almost tangible boundaries of the emotional and psychological space between groups of men and groups of women. Playing *gamelan* and collecting materials for a ceremony is normally *men's* work; making offerings is women's work. Each of these activities, and the same-sex groups that accomplished the necessary tasks together, allow men and women a place and role with which they were clearly associated. So, now that women play *gamelan*, will men start making offerings? If a man takes particular pride in his position in his *gamelan*, or in his understanding of music, or even in playing *gamelan* at all, what happens when his wife also begins to play? And what if she is good? Or what if the man doesn't play *gamelan* and his wife does? She is stepping into a territory with which he is supposed

⁵This is also the time when women have the added duties of preparing offerings. Based on observations Banjar Pengosekan.

⁶See Nasreen (1998) for a discussion on issues of space and gender construction in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

to be familiar, but is not, even though he is a man! These are rhetorical questions that I pose not to suggest that this is the internal dialogue that happens when a woman begins to play *gamelan*, but rather as an example of some of the possible sources of tensions.

Women are moving into a space that has previously belonged exclusively to men. In some areas, the influx of women interested in *gamelan* is met with great enthusiasm and support from local men's groups who seem to find plenty of "space" for both men and women. In other cases, the potential tensions and conflict of competition have come to the fore. Let us look at two case studies to illustrate the range of reactions to *gamelan wanita*.⁷

In both villages A and B, the men's groups have a long history as respected musicians and are well known through many regions of Bali. Both villages have a women's group, also highly respected. Both women's groups have made appearances at the Bali Arts Festival and were active well before and after the competitions. The interaction between the men's and women's groups in these particular villages is fascinating, for it illustrates the great diversity of reactions to developments in women's *gamelan*.

In village A, the women were becoming increasingly well known and had acquired a regular tourist performance which took them out of their village into the tourist areas, where they would play their "entertainment" repertoire. In addition, they have been honored with numerous invitations to play for important government events, formal dinners, etc. They are, like group B, a highly cohesive *sebanan* women's *gamelan*. In village B, the women have more recently gained recognition, but also play frequently at temple ceremonies, including very important ceremonies in other villages. They are extremely active, and have performed for tourists on a "commission" basis. Both command a large repertoire and are cohesive groups with strong leaders.

In both groups, many of the women are related to men in the men's *gamelan*. However, the general reaction of the men's *gamelan* and indeed the structural relationship of the groups themselves are quite different. In village A, all decisions for the women's group must be approved by the men's group, particularly decisions about opportunities to perform. Although there are individual members of the men's *gamelan* who do wish to support the *gamelan wanita*, on several occasions, the men's group has not allowed the women's group to perform or in negotiation has laid down virtually impossible "conditions" for the performance. The women's group, though highly respected by other *gamelan wanita* groups, has little autonomy.

In contrast, the men's group of village B is quite supportive of the activities of the women's group. On one occasion, the women's group of village B represented the *banjar* at a local festival, though all of the other participants were men's groups. Many of the members of the men's group attend major performances of the women's

⁷Conversations with Sarah Willner were critical in my formation of this discussion. See Willner (1996 [1992]) for more on the complexities of village dynamics in the life of a *gamelan wanita*.

group, offering supportive criticism to the female musicians. On another occasion, the men's and women's groups actually performed with both groups on the stage at the same time, alternating pieces on two sets of instruments for a major temple ceremony in a neighboring village. Neither group "shortened" their program, and both played a full range of pieces. The entire performance lasted almost four hours.

These two villages and their different ways of negotiating the changes in their worlds illustrate the complexity and seriousness of the issues at hand. One group restricted the activities of the women's group, the other, supported it through teaching, criticism and advice. The differences in economic and educational opportunities is notable, with village B having more access to the tourist economy and more of its youth having finished higher levels of education. The performance styles of the men's groups of A and B reflect perhaps their philosophy, with A being more conservative and reserved, though equally impressive technically when compared to B which a tendency to be younger, more "flashy" and more "worldly." A number of key members have already had several international performance opportunities. Thus, there is no one way that Balinese people are negotiating this adjustment of psychological space.

In addition to moving into a different social and psychological space, these women and all female *gamelan* players have begun to move into a different physical space, or perhaps more accurately, have added this space to those to which they already have access. The performance of *gamelan*, and *gong kebyar*, *beleganjur* and *angklung*, in particular take place in open public spaces. The inside of the temple, though filled with people from the entire village, is in many ways still quite private and is called the "inside". The pavilion just outside the temple and *bale banjar*, in contrast, are much more open—the "outside". During ceremonies, women can be found throughout the temple moving around, but the place where they frequently sit and chat while waiting for the prayer to begin, is the "inside". Likewise, the ancient forms of dance such as *rejang* usually take place inside the temple.

As women began to dance as part of the "entertainment" (*balih-balihan*), they also started dancing and rehearsing in the *bale banjar* and in the pavilion just outside the temple. The *bale banjar*, the central gathering and meeting place for a *banjar* and other village gatherings, was long the physical space for men. With women dancing and the creation of the PKK groups, women began to move into the space for meetings or performances. Now if a village has a new PKK women's *gamelan* or a Seka Gong Wanita, the women may be spending as much time as men (if not more during times of intensive rehearsal) in the *bale banjar*.

There are some villages where the *gamelan* instruments themselves are sacred, and women were not even allowed to get onto the raised area of the pavilion in which the instruments rested, much less touch them, far less *play gamelan*. Yet recently, even in such villages, with special offerings of atonement, women have been allowed to sit on the raised area of their *bale banjar* and play *gamelan*. With this kind of opportunity,

the women of the village of Perean have become one of the most well known and highly regarded women's *gamelan* in Bali.

During the period of my research in 1997, the women of Pengosekan spent up to five hours on the *bale banjar* rehearsing and socializing prior to rehearsing. The high level of activity of the *two* women's groups in Pengosekan at that time made it necessary to agree on a kind of schedule so that all of the groups (men and women) would have time on the *bale banjar* to practice. With the founding of a new school in the village where boys and girls study both music and dance, a new generation of female musicians may be on the way.

While I was there, for the first time, I saw young girls sneaking up to the instruments on the *bale banjar* to get in a few minutes of practice. After having taken their offerings to temple, offered prayers and socialized with friends, these young girls went on their own to the *bale banjar* (just across the street from the temple) and sat there practicing the one piece that they knew and taking as their own a space that had not belonged to their grandmothers. Part of what gave them the courage and boldness, to do so was that they are part of a group of girls who are learning *gamelan* in a complete ensemble, taught by one of the highly respected village *gamelan* teachers. Thus, these girls and women are moving into a different space, but in a way that is consistent with "tradition"; they are moving as a group. The formation of groups of women playing *gamelan* together is thus part of a process that has allowed women to act as organized, recognized groups and move into a space and world that has long been restricted to men.

This chapter has addressed some of the philosophical ideals and values that are of importance to *gamelan wanita*: *rwabhinneda* the existence of balanced, opposite and complementary parts, and the importance of *ngaturan ayah* have shaped male-female interaction and women's *gamelan*. Women's groups place a high priority on giving ritual service, and in doing so provide perhaps the strongest argument possible for their own existence. Nevertheless, women moving into what has been male space can create tensions, and there is no one manner in which these tensions are being resolved. Let us turn now to a more personal consideration of *gamelan wanita* and take case studies from the village of Pengosekan to illustrate how family, group loyalty and tradition are an integral part of women's experience as they play *gamelan*.

Family and *Banjar*: Negotiating Loyalties

1 Family

I would like to look now at the social and personal meaning of *gamelan wanita*, and in order to do so, will move from broad philosophical concepts and the discussion of space in the abstract to the implications for the personal life of a female musician and her family. The ties of family, and the sense of that family's past (including previous incarnations) and that family's future (its children and grandchildren) are a very strong part of life in Bali. A woman's family is a central part of her daily activities and plays a large role in determining the direction that her life will go. When we look at *gamelan*, the families of the musicians (male or female) have a strong impact on the extent and quality of a musician's participation in *gamelan*.

When looking at women in particular, the activities and values of a family are as critical as are the amount of work that needs to be done within one's household compound. A family (particularly a husband) may forbid or strongly discourage his wife from participating in a local *gamelan*. More often, however, the serious obstacles are a Balinese woman's extensive familial and household obligations.¹ Arranging time to rehearse with a *gamelan* group (which may involve a substantial commitment at times when the group is preparing for an important performance) may be extremely difficult after one accounts for the amount of time needed to sweep the household compound, go to the market, prepare the daily offerings, prepare food, care for one's children, care for parents or grandparents. Nursing infants also makes the amount of time that a young mother can spend outside of her home quite limited.²

While familial obligations can be a great "burden" for a woman who wants to play *gamelan*, the family can also be a critical support system. It is the family that takes care of the children if a woman is in rehearsal, particularly if the woman's group is preparing for a major performance, such as the Bali Arts Festival competitions or a performance at a major temple ceremony in another village. At this time, the family also provides significant support and relief, and must take on extra duties to allow the women time to practice for a performance that is seen to be of great importance.³

In Pengosekan, young girls often sit with their mothers as the women's *gamelan* rehearses. Small children are usually left at home, but if they want to see their mothers, they will be carried, often by their fathers, to the *bale banjar*, where they can watch

¹See Willner's discussion of this (1996 [1992]).

²I must note, however, that the birth of a child in a family often results in diminished activity in the local *gamelan* group for both men and women. Once the child or children have reached school age (five or six) or are at least able to walk around, they are quite frequently put in the care of their extended family (who usually live in the same compound), thus freeing the parents to participate in extra-household activities.

³Based on personal observation in the village of Pengosekan.

the mother practicing. At performances, the "audience" for local small temple performances usually includes the children of the musicians, accompanied by the fathers or uncles since the other women in the family are often busy with attending to the offerings.

Family also has a very different kind of influence on women's roles in the *gamelan* because female musicians frequently take on (or are expected to take on) the instrument played by their husbands, brothers or fathers. For example, Desak Made Berati, the drummer for Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu of Pengosekan, is the sister of the drummers for the men's group. Their father is the drummer for the older generation of male musicians in the village. The several of the *reong* players in the women's group are related to *reong* players in the men's group. Particular skills are believed to be "in the family," or "in the blood" or imparted to the wife of a drummer. It is expected that such a woman will have more access to intensive training and will be in the environment of drummers, and will therefore be better able to handle the responsibility of playing drum in the women's group.⁴

In one incident in a children's class, the son of the *gamelan wanita reong* player was playing *reong* in his *gamelan* class, his mother sat before him and taught him even though she was not the "teacher" for the class. The fact that she is his mother who is also a *reong* player and the head of the women's group, combined with her strong personality and the male teachers' openness made this very unusual scene possible—a woman teaching her son to play *gamelan*.

This brings us then to the issue of the family as a place of learning and the importance of the environment created by the family in the development of a young musician. The importance of a supportive environment for the development of artistic talent is not, of course, limited to Bali. However, in a place where paying for "private lessons" is a rarity, where a teacher is paid in service and loyalty (and perhaps rice) from the student, the family environment takes on a slightly different meaning, and the teachings and expectations of the family are of critical importance.

If a woman is born to a family of musicians, she is, like her brothers probably submerged in musical culture, surrounded by instruments, allowed to bang away on the instruments and encouraged to dance even before she can walk. If she decides to study music she may be tirelessly encouraged and relentlessly criticized by the musicians in her family. In the past, it was usually the boys of the family who were most strongly encouraged, but the numerous great female musicians who have arisen are almost all from families of musicians.

The natal household of Desak Made Berati is full of musicians. The level of musical expertise in the house is high and the criticism that one hears is blunt and detailed. As Berati displays both a talent for and an interest in playing music, her playing is scrutinized by her brothers who are quick to point out her deficiencies and

⁴This is based on observations and discussions with both male and female musicians of *Banjar Pengosekan*, in November 1997.

who will quietly mumble their approval at her abilities. Their educated criticism is not only directed at her, but also at each other, and in my view, the criticism she receives seems no less biting than that which her brothers receive from each other.

Unlike the numerous visitors who came through the house studying music, Berati did not sit down to organized lessons with her brothers. Because she had already acquired the basic technique and had a very good understanding of music, she received critiques of her playing. At the same time, she notes when preparing for the Bali Arts Festival, one of her brothers (who was training the women's group at that time) was sometimes highly critical, and she was frustrated with her own sensitivity. "I get frustrated with myself because I *cry* sometimes. Once (my brother) was teaching the group in the *bale banjar*, and he is sometimes very harsh when he teaches. Tears started coming out of my eyes, and it made everyone scared. I was mad at myself for crying! But I kept drumming...with tears rolling down my face."

Her brother's high expectations, Berati's strength and her willingness to keep playing even when placed in the embarrassing situation of crying in public, have helped her become the drummer of an "award winning" women's group. Berati's family readily recognizes her talent and will not tolerate her playing in a mediocre manner. Her family's criticism and expectations, together with their readiness to care for her two young daughters (who are usually watched by their father, grandmothers or uncles) are part of an environment that makes it possible for a woman like Berati from a small village to become a very good musician. Were Berati from a household where music were not considered a worthwhile endeavor for women, it would be practically impossible for her to reach her full potential.

In another case, that of Ibu Suryatini of Kayumas, family environment was also critical. At a young age, Ibu Suryatini was playing *gender* with highly respected male musicians. Her father and brothers are also renowned artists and her young niece is already known in the next regency for her musicianship. It was in this household that one of the first women's groups, Puspasari was formed in Bali. Ibu Suryatini now teaches music at STSI and recently played (with three other women) on an international tour with a group from Badung. This group was perhaps one of the first of its kind to make a high profile performance tour with women and men playing together.

The role of male family members in allowing female children into an otherwise male-world is not uncommon. There are many examples of great women who received their first education and more important support in their homes as children.⁵ In these cases, it is not because there are no sons to carry on the family tradition, but simply that the children of the family, both girls and boys, are often more likely to

⁵At the Conference on Engendering the History of Early Modern Southeast Asia Professor Barbara Watson Andaya pointed out the significant role that fathers often play in "educating" their daughters. In this case, Berati is indeed the daughter of a drummer, and Ibu Ketut Suryatini, who is well-known for her accomplishments on *gender* is the daughter of a highly respected *gender* player.

have access to the musical traditions of their families.

Thus far, this discussion of family has indicated some of the many ways in which a family's support and environment can be critical factors in encouraging the musical education of a young girl. The family can be critical contributors to the development of *gamelan wanita*. However, as we have seen, the picture is not always positive, and there are many times, as we might imagine, that a woman's family or familial obligations and playing *gamelan* do not always come together in this way.

One of the most critical family relationships for a Balinese is the relationship between husband and wife. The philosophical relationship of male and female in the balance of *rwabhinneda* is often quite different from the reality of daily life, but in order to focus our discussion, let us look at the relationship between Balinese customs of marriage and the development of women's *gamelan* in Bali.

2 *Sebunan* and Patrilocality

2.1 Group Unity and Outmarriage

Sebunan refers to the quality of being from one *banjar*. Thus, a group (men's or women's) is *sebunan* if all of its members are from the same *banjar*. For men's groups this is quite straightforward, as a boy will become a member of the *banjar* where he is born once he is married. Recently, with greater demographic movement, *banjar* affiliations have become more complicated, but in general a man is either born into his *banjar*, or if he moves, opts to become a member of a different *banjar* (though he will still maintain ties with his ancestral shrines).

A *banjar* is both a physical area as well as the all male group that meets to make major decisions that will impact on that area. Women, as such are part of the *banjar*, without being part of the men's meeting group (women now have the PKK, which is a parallel, though different organization from the *banjar*). A girl is born into a particular *banjar*, but will become a permanent "resident/member" of her husband's *banjar* when she marries. The strong patrilocal system of marriage in Bali thus makes women temporary members who are likely to move at marriage. This has been exacerbated in recent years as increased availability of transportation makes schooling in different villages and different regencies increasingly common, and women frequently marry men who are from areas very distant from their natal *banjar*.

With the exception of young couples who live in Denpasar, almost all couples live in the house compound of the husband's family. If a woman marries a man from her own village, she may live a few hundred yards from her home and family (though at marriage she still must take leave of the ancestors in her family compound). She can visit her family and in fact may be marrying a member of her extended family, and significantly for our discussion of women's *gamelan*, can remain a member of the same *gamelan wanita*. However, if she marries a man from a different village, she leaves her family, her *banjar*, her ancestors, her temples and her *gamelan*, her artistic



Figure 1: Girls gamelan group (Photo ©Jorge Vismara)

community.

So why does she not then simply join the *gamelan* of her husband's village? In order to understand the depth of the impact of patrilocality on a women's *gamelan*, it is necessary to clarify something about the nature of playing Balinese *gamelan*. It is not simply about striking metallophones, drums and gongs. The tremendous accuracy required to play the interlocking patterns that serve as one of the primary structure of Balinese *gamelan* make technical skill a necessity. However, one cannot simply select the finest musicians available, put them into the same group and expect them to be able to play well together. The great variety in local styles of Balinese *gamelan* make this difficult but not impossible, especially with the increased prominence of schools such as STSI and KOKAR.

Perhaps the most important issue when looking at women's *gamelan* in its patrilocality context is the social interaction and mutual, unspoken understanding between musicians. These are critical in creating an ensemble that can play together and *feel* the music in the same way. Speed and flashy style are important, but it is difficult for a group to be truly great without a strong sense of unity of the players, both musically and socially. The cues given by the "leaders" of the ensemble are not always aural, and most groups work with a huge range of "flexibility" in the program, particularly when performing *ngayah*. A dancer may simply appear the night of the performance, and it may be decided (after the musicians have already begun playing!) that a piece will be added. Or a piece may be cut short if the priest is ready to begin the next part of the ceremony, if a dancer looks particularly tired, or if a critical costume piece is falling off.

Let us look at the specific example of the *kendang* (drum) and *ugal* player which are important leading instruments that give aural as well as visual cues to the musicians. One note or a slight change in the *ugal* player's body movement can signal a start, stop, slow down, speed up, change in dynamic or an unplanned cut of entire sections of a piece. The musicians must be able to "understand" the leading musicians even before the aural cue is given, by looking at the context and by knowing the individuals playing. Every glance is meaningful, and a smile can mean all is well or "what are you doing!?" The raise of an eyebrow can be a sign of admiration for a particularly splendid show of speed and style or an especially delicate interpretation of rhythm...or it can mean that the piece is going to be cut in half because the dancer is tired, or because the leader considers the performance very unsatisfactory. One must be able to understand these glances because they are *cues*. This understanding and instantaneous non-aural communication is obviously strongest when the musicians have played together since childhood. They have known each other for virtually their entire lives, they went to school together; they sit in temple together; they know each other. They *know* that look.

A *gamelan* group's ability to *feel* a piece together and to play as one being is one of the elements that differentiates between a group with merely good technique and

a group that is truly great. It is not just the notes that are played; it is the entire dynamic of the interaction of the group that become the sum of their performance. This has obvious relevance to the quality of women's performances. Men's village *gamelan* groups in Bali generally consist of men who have played together or at least have known each other since childhood. Women's groups, being much newer, do not yet have that history, though the ties of family, friendship and even rivalry can allow a group to go far beyond its technical abilities. While there are young girls who are now studying *gamelan gong kebyar* and who will have the advantage of studying together from a young age, they will still, as a group, have to survive the loss of players through marriage into a different locale.

Marriage can thus be a critical point in a woman's life as well as in the life of her *gamelan*, for if a key member marries a man from another village she is lost to her *gamelan*. She is no longer a member of her *banjar* of birth and usually gives up her activities in the *gamelan* in which she has been playing. Until recently, a woman's *banjar* identity was determined by her birth and her marriage. But with the development of strong *gamelan* and their strong musical and social ties, there are times when these traditions have been reconsidered by the women themselves. With the formation of such groups, we face the interesting question of a woman's "*banjar* identity" and what it comprises. In today's world of increasingly dedicated women musicians, a woman who is, for example, the drummer for her (birth) *banjar* must consider the implication of marriage and transition to another *banjar*. Her teachers and "fellow" musicians must also consider the possibility of losing a key musician. The significance of patrilocal marriage patterns when discussing the development of strong women's *gamelan* groups occurred to me while I was in Pengosekan and the issue of the marriage of Desak Made Purnami arose repeatedly.

2.2 Case Study of Purnami and Berati

Purnami was Desak Made Berati's drumming partner in the ensemble Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu, and the two cousins had begun drumming together as a pair. For Berati, it was not simply Purnami's technical skills that was important. It is their intense mutual understanding, their ability to play spontaneously with confidence and support. The performance at the Bali Arts Festival was very important to both, when as partners they had led their *gamelan* and represented their regency in the island-wide competitions. Their ties were not only kinship or *banjar* ties, but were created by a deep musical and personal association which had developed through the shared experience of playing *gamelan*.

Soon after the Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu was honored in the Bali Festival by being asked to perform in Denpasar, Purnami moved to Peliatan to the home of her new husband. Although Peliatan is only a fifteen minute walk from Pengosekan's *bale banjar*, the fact that she was now married and a member of a different *banjar* made it awkward for her to play in her own group in Pengosekan. The situation was made

more difficult because soon after Purnami moved to Peliatan, a new women's group formed (in large part because Purnami's fame as a drummer). She was one of the first members of this new *gamelan*, and therefore would have to be "diligent" in her "own" (new) group.

Purnami's presence was an impetus behind the establishment of a new women's group in Peliatan, but her original group, which was already fairly mature with a large repertoire and skilled musicians, was left without one of its drummers. The situation was upsetting for everyone, including the male teachers of her "home" group who were uncomfortable with the necessity of substituting a male drummer during performances. A distinct imbalance was created.

Desak Made Berati on the "loss" of her partner Purnami (paraphrased):

I was so happy when she and I played together. I *understand* her, and she *understands* me! It feels great to play *kendang* with her. I just look at her and she knows what I am thinking, and when she looks at me, I know what she is thinking. I never had to worry. If I thought we needed to cut a piece in the middle of a performance, she would *know*. I felt so at ease playing with her. Now she has married a man from Peliatan, and since she moved there, they have formed a new women's group in that *banjar*. She can rarely come and play with our group...*But she is my partner...* Without (Purnami) it is very difficult for me. I am no longer satisfied when I play (since she has left). It's not that I am playing anything *wrong*, I just feel unsatisfied. I have lost my drumming partner, and I don't know who will be able to replace her. I just don't feel happy or satisfied playing without her. It's just not the same.

The loss here is not merely the loss of a talented musician. Others in Pengosekan were also quite concerned about how to fill the vacancy left by Purnami's marriage into another village. A woman moving into the next village to live with her husband's family would have been a source of expected sadness for her immediate family, but hardly something discussed by the village as a whole. Purnami's role as a significant musician in her village made her absence of concern to a large group of people who otherwise would have simply accepted it as the custom of marriage. Her accomplishments as a musician made her a highly valuable member of her *gamelan* and *banjar*, as she was the drummer for the women's group that brought prestige to the village. For a woman or a group of women to bring prestige to their *banjar* through her musical abilities can have far reaching implications for her relationship to the *banjar*, and thus affect their reaction when she marries "away."

When I left Bali in early November of 1997, this situation was still unresolved. Berati's cousin, a young man from the men's *sekaa* was playing in Purnami's place. For one very important performance, Berati and another key member of the women's group sought out Purnami, and asked that she play, but it was only for that one per-

formance. Then she returned to her new home. In March 1998, I spoke to Berati on the telephone. When I asked how the women's group was doing she responded with great enthusiasm saying that things were going very well. When I asked for details, she reported that Purnami was playing with their group again. Pleasantly surprised, I asked how that came to be, and Berati informed me that they had decided that it was very important that Purnami play, so the head of the women's group, its sponsor (both women) and Berati had gone to Purnami's house to ask that she be allowed to play with her old group.

Her husband seemed to have no reservations, so with permission from her family, and with the aid of the common motor bike, she was making the short trip to Pengosekan for rehearsals. Berati was very happy and relieved, for they had agonized for some time about the ethics of "borrowing" as well as having to settle some internal complications within the group. In the end, the strength of her ties to her women's *gamelan* were enough to permit an unusual situation where Purnami, at least for the present, can maintain close ties to a group belonging to her "old" *banjar*⁶ in addition to playing with her "new" *banjar*.

Purnami's situation brought to the fore a number of issues. First, the difficulty of forming and maintaining a strong, unified women's *gamelan* in a patrilocal society. Second the "seeds" that are planted by patrilocal marriage and its implications for the spread and growth of women's *gamelan*. Third, the construction of identity and loyalty for women in Bali and how it may be adjusting to meet the strong demands and emotions of playing *gamelan* together as well as to the powerful bonds that it fosters between women.

Because a strong Balinese *gamelan* is not simply a group that can play in a fast and flashy manner, but is also a group that can *feel* the music as one, creating a strong *gamelan* is not simply about training musicians. Bapak Dewa Nyoman Oka, the principle teacher for Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu of Pengosekan shared some of his thoughts with me on the subject of creating a strong women's *gamelan*. At the time I spoke with him in November, he was still struggling to find a way to deal with Purnami's loss and talked about the difficulties he and the group face when trying to build and maintain a strong *seka gong wanita* (women's *gong kebyar* club). For example, even if there had been a good drummer available, Berati would have a difficult time finding a true partner, and Bapak Oka recognized that problem. He was quite exasperated by the situation. He reflected on the difficulty of teaching and maintaining a young women's group, including the distraction and confusion of adolescence which in his view make it difficult for young women to concentrate (in large part because of the concerns about marriage away from family). In addition, if a young woman

⁶The details of this issue are rather complicated, as the group in question is actually a *sekaa*, a group that is really independent of the *banjar* itself. However, this is an administrative technicality, and the group is generally perceived to be and in practice in many ways is one of Pengosekan's women's *gamelan*.

decided to marry a man from a distant village, she would no longer be able to play with her group, and as Bapak Oka pointed out, Balinese women in the past have generally married fairly close to home. Today, women are marrying men from different villages, regencies, even different continents.

From the teachers perspective, training a truly great musician takes not only time, but involves a tremendous emotional commitment on the part of both student and teacher. To have a musician move away at the peak of her career is traumatic for the teacher as well as for the young woman concerned. As Bapak Oka and others recognize, early training is essential to develop the muscular strength and flexibility required to play well. Therefore, Bapak Oka notes, if you train young girls you are likely to lose many of your musicians once they marry, however, if you wait until they are older and married (which he advocated for stability purposes), they will not be able to attain the same level of technical skill. At least a teacher knows that they will stay in the village and be members of the *gamelan*!

These are *not* problems that men's groups must deal with.

On the other hand, if we look at the other side of virilocal marriage patterns, we can see that in Purnami's case, her marriage into another village allowed a "seed" of sorts to be planted in that *banjar*. Since she was well known as "Pengosekan's drummer, her arrival was a catalyst for the formation of a new women's group in a *banjar* where none had existed. So while a strong group can be made weaker, a weak group may benefit greatly, or a *banjar* with no *gamelan wanita* may be inspired to start one. Thus, while the development and maintenance of a strong women's group is in many ways hampered by virilocal/patrilocal marriage patterns, in some cases the marriage of a woman into a different area can stimulate women's activities in *gamelan* in that area, though perhaps at the expense of the continuity and strength of her own group.

This is quite different, of course from the situation of men's groups, as they will generally remain in their home villages. It is easier to train and maintain a strong men's group, which will generally play from childhood into old age, or until the musicians are replaced by a younger generation (often comprised of the sons and nephews of the older musicians). Although men cannot therefore become founding members of a group in a different *banjar* (as with Purnami) exceptional young men will often teach in various villages, sometimes traveling great distances to do so.

The costs as well as the benefits of virilocal marriage are thus substantial for women's groups. A delicate balance is being negotiated in intra- and inter- group dynamics as age old traditions of the wife following her husband and assuming unquestionable membership in his *banjar* begin to meet the passion of great musicians who have a strong desire to maintain the unity of their own groups, even after marriage.

It is a significant step when women decide that the unity of their group, the quality of their music, and their own partnerships warrant going to the house of a married

woman who is no longer under the “jurisdiction” of her old home, to ask that she be allowed to play in her *gamelan*. It is an indication of what may be a more assertive female voice. As the world of Balinese women expands, the creation of groups like those centered around *gamelan*, has the potential to foster stronger ties between individuals and a greater sense of solidarity as a group. From this solidarity, women can find the strength to argue for maintenance of those ties. It also suggests that *gamelan* groups may serve to incorporate “newcomers” into a *banjar*, providing a context for socializing and creating new bonds.

Although there are no clear customs that require that a woman cut ties with her old group, her own *banjar*’s activities must be her primary concern. Because the Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu is not the “*banjar*” group, so to speak, but rather an independent women’s *gamelan* that is based in and draws its members from one *banjar*, the situation in Pengosekan was somewhat easier to negotiate. But the question remains, what does it mean for a women’s *gamelan* to be *sebunan*? Does it mean all the women are official residents and members of one *banjar*, or can it also include women who were born in that *banjar*, but who have married men in different villages?

The development of strong *gamelan wanita* groups in Bali has fostered the renegotiation of constructions of women’s identity. These are issues that never would have come into question otherwise, and they represent a reconsideration of strictly locally and familially bound groups for women. Female musicians are no longer, only “Wayan’s wife” or “Eka’s mother.” They are also “Pengosekan’s drummer” or “Perean’s *trompong* player.” These are identities abstracted not out of their familial relations, but out of their musical accomplishments, their artistic and public value to their communities.

Although there may be more than one *ugal* player for a group, there is almost always *one* of these that is considered *the ugal* player. When a woman begins to be remembered or recognized as “the drummer for Pengosekan,” her identity is expanded beyond her family. The *gamelan* becomes a representative for the village and she is a leader of that representative body. The training involved with learning drum or *ugal*, or even *trompong*, is not only musical. These are key leading instruments, and to play them well one must be able to be a leader.

The fluidity with which a *gamelan* can play is based on a common understanding of responsibilities within the *gamelan*, respect for the “tradition,” and even more than technical skill, cooperative, collective effort and sensitivity to the overall mood and direction of the group. These are values are familiar to women, but here are manifested in a different way, for in *gamelan wanita*, there are no men. The women are the leaders, followers, the strength and the core of the *gamelan*. Their teachers have taught them the necessary tools and their communities may be supporting them, but at the moment of performance these must all come together through the women themselves.

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the issues of an expanding iden-

tity for women is clear. These women are not *only* members of their family's or their husband's *banjar*. They may also be members of a community of musicians, and this identity ties them (in this case, Purnami) strongly to their natal homes and to their own personal and artistic social relations.

3 *Gamelan Wanita* and Group Solidarity

Gamelan wanita groups and the strong solidarity that can be created may have the possibility of a symbolic though not "affective" role in local political questions. In Pengosekan, one women's group and their "formation" has sounded a strong political note. After much debate over whether or not the *banjar* should split into "South" and "North", the men were still unable to reach a consensus on whether or of the village should divide officially. They had long shared their temples, work, ceremonies, and artistic groups, and the discussion were very heated. The women's PKK, which like the men's *banjar* had members from both the southern and northern areas, made a clear statement. They divided themselves into two PKK's. When the PKK split, the southern half immediately, almost as a declaration of independence, created an *angklung* group comprised of women from the southern area.

There are three men's *gamelan* in the village, two *gong kebyar* (both loosely associated with the north), and one *gamelan angklung*, (loosely associated with the south). The original PKK group, less than one year old, was learning *gong kebyar* music. That the women of the "southern" PKK decided to play *angklung* was a clear statement of their identity with the southern area and artistic (and in ways ritual) distinctness from their northern counterparts. Although their action cannot be characterized as having affected political change, it certainly was a clear statement of the women's opinion on the subject of separation. One member of the newly northern PKK group attended the first ceremony for the new (southern) group and was roundly criticized by her own group. She was perceived as a member of the original group who should therefore make her loyalty clear.

In this case, *gamelan* group membership identified a woman's political and regional identity, and the women used their solidarity to create smaller groups with clearly defined boundaries. Technically, one could play in both *gamelan*, but there was strong pressure not to do so, as it was crossing this newly created boundary and blurring the set of identities that was being created by the women themselves. Thus, unlike familial interaction or loyalties, the formation of women's *gamelan* groups is one area where women themselves are deciding where the boundaries of loyalty lie.

As women become more active in *gamelan wanita*, they begin to engage their communities and families in a "negotiation" as they weigh the strength and importance of custom with that of their own personal and artistic ties to other women. The family plays a critical role in a woman ability to play *gamelan*. Family obligations that conflict with intensive rehearsal schedules may become a source of tension. However, the family can also provide significant support both practically and artistically. As women

play *gamelan* together, group loyalties develop and despite tensions, strong ties may develop, creating a sense of community and common effort, based not on kinship or *banjar* relations, but rather on common interest and even passion for *gamelan* and a mutual, personal understanding.

Conclusion

As Balinese women begin to play *gamelan*, they challenge themselves and their communities to negotiate and reclarify what it means to be feminine and what it means to play *gamelan* well. Artistic change has been a part of a long history of change and continuity in Bali, and discussion of the formation of women's *gamelan* groups illustrates how social, political and artistic change created possibilities for women as they began to play *gamelan* in groups. The rapid growth of *gamelan wanita* has been the result of an interaction between women, their communities, families, ritual environment, individual motivation and government policy. The development of women's *gamelan* has in many ways reflected larger forces of continuity and change. However, women's *gamelan* is not merely a result of social change. It is an integral part of a reshaping and redefining of boundaries and social space and as such affects the ritual, social, political world in which it exists

The first issue that presents itself is the obvious one of femininity and the female in what has been masculine space. Many Balinese people are grappling with the question of how women can be doing men's work in men's space. The idea of the feminine's association with the "inside"/domestic and the masculine with the "outside"/public is not new, nor is it unique to Bali (Creese 1998 ; Nasreen 1998). However, the subtlety of the associations of space are particularly interesting in Bali, as they are not *purdah*-like restrictions of female activity but are regarded as, simply custom. The delineation of male and female space becomes more important at marriage when women spend more time in the home and in the inner parts of the temple.

When married women play *gamelan*, they extend their ritual (artistic) performance lives, and move into a public space. They spend large amounts of time in the *bale banjar*, being seen by the entire community, even taking part in island-wide competitions. If they have a large "entertainment" repertoire, they travel as a group into different villages to perform. They thus move not only beyond temple and house walls, but also beyond the village, giving offerings of performance to temples or sometimes playing for tourists or government functions.

The increased ease of transportation and increased pressure to stay in school which has been characteristic of contemporary times have allowed women greater freedom of movement geographically. However rehearsing in the *bale banjar*, playing outside of the temple and engaging in public competition are all important *symbolic* events where women are moving as large groups into arenas that have been strongly associated with public and masculine forces, or more simply, with men.

The tension of women moving into this masculine space provokes negotiation in the Balinese community. Scholarly research has been explicitly engaged in such discussions. However, it seems that there is also a non-verbal "discussion" that takes

place in the villages, in the negotiation of priority in the *bale banjar*, or use of the instruments, and in the accommodation of playing at temple ceremonies. The indirect negotiations of space and priority clarify a community's deeper underlying values, which can vary greatly from village to village, particularly with regard to women's activities in *gamelan*. In some areas the strength of tradition or fear of losing power creates a distinct tension between men's and women's groups, which may manifest itself as the denial of performance and rehearsal opportunities to the women's groups. Perhaps for the first time, women and men are competitors. In other villages where there seems to be a philosophy that the arts can be expanded infinitely, the men's group may actively support the women's group. In these communities it seems that the artistic world is not divided amongst existing groups, but rather inclusively embraces new participants, growing larger with each new entity.

In addition to its significance in the relationship between men and women, perhaps the key issues when considering women's *gamelan* groups are the creation of a community of women and women's attitudes about their communities. *Gamelan* is a space for the nurturing of solidarity between women based not on kinship, but on shared personal interests and experience. Some groups are *sebunan* and their members are all from one locally bound *banjar*. However, others draw from more than one *banjar* and select from a wider community, bringing together women from different *banjar* and creating a strong group even across village and kinship lines. There are social adjustments implicit in this phenomenon, as the strong emotional and psychological bonds created while playing *gamelan* bring women together into organized groups that move together in public. Women have the opportunity to make strong ties with women from other *banjar* (or maintain them with women from their own *banjar* even after marriage)—ties based on music, arts, common activity, mutual understanding.

Part of the completion of this community is the establishment of "leaders" such as the *ugal* and drum players who must lead their group effectively and with great courage and boldness if the group is to be a success. The musical training involves also a "social" leadership training where tempos, dynamics, etc. are lead by the women themselves. Thus, as individuals, women may learn to become musical leaders of their *gamelan*. As a group, the women's *gamelan* may serve as representatives of their village and *banjar* and as such have the responsibility to act in a way that reflects well on their village.

The importance of *gamelan wanita* is manifested in women's attitudes about *gamelan* matters and issues concerning their groups. Because the musicians are exclusively female, women can be relatively assertive (in public) about their concerns for their *gamelan* if the village environment is sympathetic. Such a "safe place" where women's concerns about their own activities and their own communities can be voiced is significant and may have ramifications far beyond music. As the Pengosekan case illustrates, with group cohesiveness women may be more likely to express their opinions

in *banjar* "politics". Perhaps this is a first step towards greater involvement in public affairs.

The women of Bali's past were often the spoils of war. For male rulers, the loss and gain of women was a symbolic and actual indication of political power and alignments. For much of Bali's history women have been tools for political alliances between male rulers (Creese 1998: 13-18). After Indonesian independence, the policies of "guided democracy" handed down political decisions for both men and women of Bali. Although there is no prohibition on women's involvement in politics, women still have virtually no political power in Bali. They may have significant economic and social influence, but *banjar* decisions seldom take into account the concerns of the feminine "counterpart". If tradition and separation of women (through patrilocal marriage) tend to diminish their abilities to maintain cohesive groups that allow them to express their concerns publicly, then perhaps the strong communities of *gamelan wanita* can open the doors for other kinds of non-family, non-*banjar*-bound, "interest" groups.

1 Implications for the future

If the momentum of these groups continues, there is the possibility that the solidarity we find growing in *gamelan wanita* may encourage more women to study *gamelan* and perhaps even to consider forming groups focused on other causes. However, the ominous political and economic situation of Indonesia make it increasingly difficult to predict what the future of women's *gamelan* will be. If Bali's tremendous economic prosperity allowed women more opportunities to spend time playing music, then economic collapse is a particularly harsh test for women's *gamelan*. Certainly it will provide fuel for critics of women's *gamelan* who may consider the activities frivolous or inappropriate. Yet the strong non-economic functions of women's *gamelan* are of significance in terms of ritual obligation, social unity and women's desire to play. This may indeed be strong enough to weather the current economic and political crisis in Indonesia.

In addition to the economic crisis, the world of *gamelan wanita* faces the elimination of the Gong Wanita competitions at the Bali Arts Festival in 1998. There may be a number of reasons why this was decided: the economic crisis, the interpretation of the disbanding of Festival groups after competition as lack of female commitment, or perhaps the recent changes in regulations, which make *sebunan* groups mandatory and make it difficult for key regencies to retain their prominent positions in the women's *gamelan* competitions. It is speculated that this may have led to the diminished support of key regencies for the Gong Wanita competitions. The dramatic elimination may not be attributable to any one factor, but what is certain is that it is a blow to women's *gamelan*, as it eliminates their most prestigious and demanding venue.

However, if women's *gamelan* continues its trend towards temple performances then perhaps their energies will be directed away from the high profile and high

expense annual competitions, and will focus more on their own ritual activities. Their presence is becoming stronger in the musical environment of the temple, and this is where the heart of men's *gamelan* has existed since the beginning. If *gamelan wanita* is not to be a short lived flash of activity, then it is critical that they take their strength from ritual life, rather than from outside support. Men's *gamelan* has stood the test of economic crisis and political turmoil, holding fast in times of crisis and blossoming in times of prosperity and peace.

Yet, the question of how the economic crisis will effect women's *gamelan* remains, as do the questions of whether women will begin to develop a unique style or repertoire or whether women's and men's groups will start to mix. The very basic question of what it means to be *sebunan* is also unresolved. Perhaps the next generation of female musicians will provide answers to these questions. Today, these *gamelan wanita* provide a critical role model for Balinese children. Both boys and girls see women playing *gamelan*, see women sitting for hours in the *bale banjar*, performing on stage in full glory before hundreds of spectators; children hear them talking about and making decisions about *gamelan*. There are some groups, such as the children's groups at STSI where boys and girls (children of faculty) play together, and others where they study separately, but in parallel classes, learning comparable music and playing at the same temple festivals.

The real answers to the long term questions of how *gamelan wanita* will develop and what part it will take in Balinese communities can only be known with time. The groups created in this generation will guide and nurture those of the generations to come. The children who are learning today will play music and create their own communities that nurture and are nurtured by *gamelan*. It is they and their children who will continue to shape the world of *gamelan*, making the decisions of what to maintain and what to change. They, like their ancestors, are the spirit and life of the Balinese arts.

Appendix A Issues of Health

One of the most important and still undocumented issues surrounding *gamelan wanita* is that of its effects on women's physical and psychological health. I am far from qualified to discuss the psychological or physiological impact of playing *gamelan* on Balinese women. However, the issue was brought up by two different informants on separate occasions, without my asking (or to be perfectly honest, even having seriously considered it). These first two informants¹ discussed the matter at length, and clearly the impact of playing *gamelan* on women's health was something that they considered to be of great importance. When I asked a third informant, a male teacher of women's *gamelan*², about these issues, he agreed enthusiastically that indeed *gamelan* and playing *gamelan* can have a deep impact on the psychological and emotional state of its musicians. For that reason, despite my lack of training in this field, I will venture to reflect on the observation made by my informants.

Ibu Suryatini spoke of *gamelan*'s effect on the health of one of her students (a member of the group that Ibu Suryatini was teaching). This woman, was diagnosed as having leukemia and was sent to the hospital for surgery. Her condition was quite serious and the deterioration in her physical condition was apparent to those around her. After surgery, however, she recovered remarkably quickly and was soon back in rehearsal. She told Ibu Suryatini and other members of her group that the main reason that she recovered so quickly was that she looked forward to playing *gamelan* after getting out of the hospital. The entire time she was recovering, she was imagining her *gamelan*, thinking about when she would be able to play again.

This positive image, and the woman's strong drive to go back to playing (even though this group has a very low-profile) was a central focus of her thoughts while she recovered. She was not looking forward to a particular performance and was not focused on a desire to become a great artist, but the profound pleasure she took from playing *gamelan* even in rehearsal, was a powerful healing force.

Ibu Desak Nyoman Suarti, a Balinese woman who at a young age moved to New York, lived in the United States for over twenty years, but has returned again to live in Bali. She is the *ugal* player for Pengosekan. In speaking about the founding of the group, the psychological well being of Balinese women was at the fore of her thoughts. From the beginning, Suarti thought of the affect it would have on Balinese women's self-esteem. She realized that married Balinese women rarely "dress up" or pay close attention to their physical appearance. To do so might raise suspicions of infidelity or at least be would be considered frivolous. Suarti saw that playing *gamelan* would allow women a time and place to be beautiful in public. (Suarti, personal

¹Ibu Ni Ketut Suryatini and Ibu Desak Nyoman Suarti

²I Dewa Putu Berata

communication, article forthcoming) While bank tellers may wear cosmetics, few village women would feel comfortable spending time beautifying. Women are ideally humble and a married village woman will seldom wear fancy clothes or make-up. Performing allows women the opportunity to appear in public, knowing that they look (and sound) their best. Dewa Putu Berata points out that it allows women to feel that they are important and suggests the importance of feeling that "People will see us. We have worth and are useful".(Berata, personal communication)

A young woman's life and relationship to the community change dramatically with marriage. As a young unmarried woman, she should be modest, but may still show her full beauty. Even as she sits demurely, she radiates young feminine beauty. As a married woman, no matter how young, one's behavior takes on a whole new dimension. Diligence in familial and household affairs, deference to parents in law, proper behavior and careful raising of the children become the standard by which one is viewed.

As young girls, one's age mates are constant companions. As a married woman, one must put family over friends of youth, one has officially taken leave of one's own family and ancestors and is the newest member of a household that has existed for generations. One's primary concerns are family, not beauty or even one's own physical, much less psychological health. *Gamelan*, the community it provides, the sense of musical and personal satisfaction, the pure joy of playing, and learning, being challenged physically and mentally are powerful forces that Balinese women are beginning to recognize.

Appendix B Sample Repertoire, *Gamelan Wanita*, Gianyar Regency

Occasion: Odalan in Pura Desa Mas, September 1997

Group: Banjar Kawan, Mas

Notes: “ngelambat” (instrumental only, not “entertainment”) late afternoon in the Wantilan.

1. Gilak Baris
2. Tabuh Telu
3. Tabuh Telu (a different “Tabuh Telu”)
4. Hujan Mas

Occasion: Odalan in Desa Mas, October 1997

Group: Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu

Notes: Night time performance in the Wantilan. Purnami (drummer) was replaced by a male musician.

1. Lelambatan Tabuh Gari
2. Panyembrahma (note: all dancers were daughters of musicians playing)
3. Jauk Keras (note: first time playing with this dancer; there was no rehearsal with the dancer prior to performance)
4. Oleg Tamulilingan
5. Manuk Rawa
6. Belibis
7. Kreasi Baru (instrumental)
8. Tabuh Penutup

Occasion: Odalan in the Pura Desa, Ubud, November 1997

Group: Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu

Evening performance in the Wantilan Ubud

1. Panyembrahma
2. Oleg Tamulilingan
3. Topeng Arsa Wijaya
4. Kreasi Baru Cendrawasih
5. Tabuh Gari
6. Kebyar Trompong

Occasion: Odalan Pura Desa, Ubud, November 1997

Group: PKK Ubud Kaja- Angklung daun pitu

Notes: Daytime performance, adjacent to Puri Ubud and Wantilan Ubud

- 1. Rejang
- 2. Pendet

Glossary

Adat custom

Angklung a *gamelan* ensemble, usually in a four-tone *slendro* scale, commonly associated with cremations ceremonies, but also used in a variety of other ceremonial contexts in certain villages.

Arja A form of dance-drama that incorporates extensive dialogue and singing.

Bale Banjar Central meeting space for the *banjar*, also used for *gamelan* and dance rehearsals.

Banjar Usually a sub-unit of a village, an essential ritual and social or customary group with specific geographic boundaries, which shares the same temple group. Also refers to the all male decision making body for that area.

Beleganjur musical ensemble that is characterized by the use of thick cymbals (*ceng-ceng kopyak*) and is often played in procession to accompany cremation towers or to ward off mischievous spirits.

Desa Kala Patra refers to the idea that things exist in a certain place (*desa*) and time (*kala*) and under specific circumstances (*patra*), and that these factors must be taken into consideration.

Dharma Wanita women's auxiliary groups centered around Indonesian government offices. *Dharma Wanita* members are either female employees of the office or wives of male employees of that office. They organize a number of activities, among which are sometimes, playing *gamelan*.

"Emansipasi Wanita" Official government interpretation of "women's emancipation".

Galungan very important holy day in Balinese Hinduism that celebrates the victory of dharma, "order" over adharma, "disorder".

Gamelan general term that applies to a variety of ensembles in Java, Bali and Sunda. Can be used to refer to the instruments only, to the musicians, or to the music.

Gangsa metallophone

Gender instrument or ensemble of metallophones tuned in the *slendro* scale, played with two mallets. Also refers to any metallophone whose keys are suspended over resonators.

Gong can be used to refer to the instrument (gong) or to a particular type of ensemble (e.g. *gong kebyar*) or to the musical group. For example, *gong wanita* usually refers to a women's *gong kebyar* group.

Gong Kebyar *Kebyar* refers to a flash or explosion and describes the character of this style, which is the most popular style of *gamelan* at present in Bali. Born in North Bali in the early part of this century, and swept rapidly across the island.

Gong Wanita women's *gong kebyar* group.

Karawitan general term used to refer to *gamelan* as an art or area of study.

Kendang drum. Played in pairs (*lanang* and *wadon*), and are the primary leaders of the group often socially as well as musically.

Kidung a poetic form of singing strongly associated with ceremonies, often sung in large groups of women.

Kreasi Baru "new creation"

Kulkul large slit wood block that is struck to call together people in the *banjar* (to *ngayah* in the temple, etc.) or to make certain announcements (a marriage in the *banjar*) also used to warn of dangerous or emergency situations (fire, etc.).

Majapahit the 14th-15th century East Javanese Hindu kingdom that had strong ties with Bali. Many courtiers of Majapahit are said to have fled to Bali as Islam gained power in East Java.

Manusa Yadnya (one of the five major kinds of ceremonies). *Manusa Yadnya* refers to human rites of passage, such as tooth filing and marriage, but not including cremation ceremonies.

Mesila (to sit) cross-legged. Considered the polite way for men to sit.

Metimpuh (to sit) with one's legs tucked under (or on one's knees). Considered the polite way for women to sit.

Ngayah see *ngaturan ayah*

Ngaturan Ayah to offer ritual service or work. It can take the form of sweeping, playing music, cutting palm fronds, etc.

Odalan ceremony marking the anniversary of a particular temple.

Pendet a dance performed by a group of women during temple ceremonies as part of offerings to the gods. Now can also be seen in a "tourist" form.

Petopengan masked dance (from *topeng* or “mask”)

Rejang a very ancient form of dance, like *pendet* it is performed by a group of women for temple ceremonies, but *rejang* is not performed for tourist shows.

Reong one row of gong chimes (pots) played by four musicians.

Rwabhinneda the philosophical concept of complementary opposites that cannot exist without each other. For example: male-female, night-day.

Sebunan a group in which all the musicians are from the same *banjar*.

Sekaa (also *sekha*, *sekeha*, *seka*) a *banjar* club formed around a certain activity, for example playing *gamelan*.

Taksu a divinely granted charisma or power, “mana.”

Trompong a row of tuned pot gongs that are played by a solo musician who ornaments the most important aspects of the melody while also (like the *ugal*) leading the *gamelan* through long melodic passages.

Ugal lead *gangs*a. Important for leading the ensemble with both aural and visual cues.

Wanita woman, women

Wayang Kulit shadow puppet performance, strongly associated with religious ceremony.

Abbreviations Used

ASTI Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia. Indonesian Academy of the Arts, now STSI. Also known as the Indonesian College of Arts.

KOKAR Konservatori Karawitan. Indonesian government high school for the arts, now SMKI.

PKK Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga. (Government) women’s village organization.

SMKI Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia. High school for the arts, formerly KOKAR.

STSI Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia. Indonesian College of the Arts, formerly ASTI.

List of Informants

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following informants and *gamelan* groups

I Dewa Ketut Alit (Pengosekan) Musician, composer, painter, teacher. Acting Director of Sanggar Cudamani, member of Seka Gong Tunas Mekar. Has composed for and taught Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu. Graduate of STSI.

I Dewa Putu Berata (Pengosekan) Musician, composer, painter and teacher. Director of Seka Gong Tunas Mekar and Sanggar Cudamani in Pengosekan. He is called in to rehearse Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu when it is in preparation for a festival or competition. He is a graduate of STSI with extensive international experience as a teacher and artist.

Desak Made Berati (Pengosekan) Musician and dance teacher. Member of Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu as well as Sanggar Cudamani.

I Wayan Dibia, Ph.D. (STSI/Singapadu) Director of STSI. He is active teacher, performer and scholar. Musician, dancer, choreographer and composer.

Kyoko Kato (Japan/Pengosekan) Plays and teaches piano and has studied Balinese music and dance in Pengosekan and Ubud since 1993. She currently resides in Pengosekan and was formerly a member of Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu. She periodically plays rebab with Pengosekan's Seka Gong Tunas Mekar and with Sanggar Cudamani, (both groups are otherwise all-male).

I Dewa Nyoman Oka (Pengosekan) Primary teacher for Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu. He has taught since the inception of the group and continues today with the help of assistants from the men's group. He was a member of Pengosekan's Tunas Mekar, but "retired" from active playing in the mid-1980's.

Desak Nyoman Rai (Pengosekan) Musician in Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu

I Wayan Rai, Ph.D. (STSI/Ubud) Active teacher and scholar both at STSI and in his own village. He works with both the men's group, Sadha Budaya as well as the newly formed women's "PKK" group from Ubud Kaja.

Gusti Ayu Raka Musician and head of Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu. She was a key founding member whose active lobbying in Pengosekan made the Seka Gong Wanita a reality. She is also a musician in Mekar Sari, Peliatan.

Desak Nyoman Suart (Pengosekan/USA) Musician and dancer. Member of Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu also administrative coordinator and sponsor for Sanggar Cudamani.

Ni Wayan Sueni Musician and dance teacher in Pengosekan. She is a member of the Pengosekan's "PKK" *gamelan* as well as dance teacher in Sanggar Cudamani.

I Made Sukadana (Pejeng) Member of Sanggar Cudamani. Dalang (shadow master) who is also actively involved in the organization of Sanggar Cudamani.

Ni Ketut Suryatini (STSI/ Kayumas, Badung) one of the most active and well

respected female musicians in Bali. She is currently a teacher in the music department at STSI. She and her brother Wayan Suweca were the founders of Puspasari.

I Wayan Wija (Sukawati/Peliatan) Dalang (shadow puppet master). One of the most prominent and popular dalang in Bali today. His understanding of and ability to communicate aspects of Balinese philosophy are an essential part of his work as a dalang.

Sarah Willner (USA/Perean) Musician with Gamelan Sekar Jaya, California. While living in Perean she played as a member of the women's group Gamelan Abdi Budaya. She has also played as a guest in numerous other (men's groups), often playing rebab.

Members of: Seka Gong Wanita Mekar Ayu, Banjar Pengosekan
 Seka Gong "PKK", Banjar Pengosekan
 Seka Angklung Wanita "PKK", Banjar Pengosekan
 Seka Gong Tunas Mekar, Banjar Pengosekan
 Sanggar Cudamani
 Gamelan Abdi Budaya, Banjar Anyar, Perean, Tabanan
 Gamelan Mekar Sari, Peliatan
 Gamelan Sekar Jaya, California

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